Men-at-Arms

OSPREY PUBLISHING

Armies of the Greek–Italian War 1940–41

Phoebus Athanassiou • Illustrated by Peter Dennis

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3
- The historical context

CHRONOLOGY 5
- 28 October 1940–6 April 1941
- Aftermath: the German invasion, 6–27 April 1941

OVERVIEW OF THE OPPOSING FORCES 7

THE GREEK ARMY 10
- The legacy of the Greek–Turkish War (1919–22)
- Re-armament and reorganization, 1935–40
- Organization: regiments – divisions – order of battle
- Character: conscripts, and officer corps
- Uniforms & insignia: enlisted ranks – officers – rank, and arm of service – Royal Gendarmerie
- Weapons & personal equipment

THE ITALIAN ARMY 20
- Composition and organization: regiments – divisions – order of battle
- Character: conscripts, and officer corps
- Uniforms & insignia: enlisted ranks – officers – rank, and arm of service
- Weapons & personal equipment

AIR & NAVAL FORCES 35
- Air Forces
- Naval Forces

ALLIES & AUXILIARIES 39
- British & Empire Forces
- Cypriot volunteers
- Albanian auxiliary forces

CONCLUSION 41

PLATE COMMENTARIES 43

INDEX 48

Men-at-Arms • 514

Armies of the Greek–Italian War 1940–1941

Phoebus Athanassiou • Illustrated by Peter Dennis
Series editor Martin Windrow

ARMIES OF THE GREEK–ITALIAN WAR 1940–41

INTRODUCTION

A Greek conscript bids goodbye to his family. Despite Greece's tumultuous politics during the 1930s, the unprovoked Italian invasion caused a spontaneous surge of patriotic fervour and a rare show of national unity among combatants and civilians alike, which lasted throughout the war of 1940–41. (© War Museum, Athens)

When, in the early hours of 28 October 1940, elements of the *Regio Esercito* (Italian Royal Army) crossed the frontier from occupied Albania into Greece, few observers expected the smaller and less modern Greek Army (*Ellinikòs Stratòs*) to hold its own against Italy's much-vaunted (even if greatly exaggerated) 'eight million bayonets'. And yet, for the best part of the following six months, Greece's armed forces were to successfully fight a taxing campaign, both defensive and offensive, in what came to be known as the Greek–Italian War. The first 20 days of the conflict saw the Italian Army – tested in war in Abyssinia, Spain and the French Alps – thrown back into Albania soon to be forced into a bloody stalemate in the snow-bound mountains, which was to last until Germany's military intervention on 6 April 1941.

However short-lived, this was to be the first major Axis setback of World War II, at a time when most of Continental Europe had either succumbed to Nazi Germany's *Blitzkrieg* or sided with the Axis. The 'Albanian Miracle', as it came to be known in Greece, was largely the product of Greece's preparedness to fight, in conjunction with Italy's egregious miscalculations. This short book aims to provide an historical introduction to the war, and as much of an account of the armies involved as its limited space will allow.

The historical context

By the time of the outbreak of the Greek–Italian War, Continental Europe was only just beginning to settle into the sinister 'New Order' imposed by the German Third Reich. Following a chain of sweeping victories between September 1939 and June 1940, Germany had occupied western Poland, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and northern France. Borders had also shifted elsewhere as an indirect consequence of German aggression: eastern Poland, the Baltic States, Bessarabia and Bukovina had been annexed by the Soviet Union under the terms of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact of 23 August 1939.

In the Balkans, the geopolitical situation was fluid. Yugoslavia vacillated between Britain and Germany, while its neighbour Bulgaria was biding its time in the hope of realizing some of its unfulfilled territorial aspirations. Romania was to side with the Axis in October 1940, shortly after being forced to cede northern Transylvania to Hungary, and southern Dobrudja (Dobrogea) to Bulgaria. Turkey had remained neutral, but given the historic enmity towards Greece its reaction in the event of an attack on Greece was difficult to predict.

Although far less impressive, Fascist Italy's early World War II record reflected its territorial ambitions within its perceived sphere of influence

1939: a cheerful group of Italian *Bersaglieri* light infantry, identified by their black cockerel-feather helmet plumes, pose in the port of Brindisi on the 'heel' of Italy before being shipped over to Albania. That country had already been under significant Italian influence since its civil war in 1925, in which Italy had intervened, and its annexation in April 1939 was practically unopposed. (Private collection)

(the Eastern Mediterranean basin), as well as Mussolini's personal desire to emulate Hitler's successes. On 7 April 1939 – less than one month after Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia – Italy had invaded and annexed Albania, largely unopposed. On 10 June 1940 Italy declared war on Great Britain and France, and after the fall of Paris, four days later, Italian troops would invade south-eastern France. France was to sign a separate armistice with Italy on 24 June, following fighting in which a relative handful of French defenders had inflicted 630 killed and more than 2,000 wounded on the opportunistic invaders.

After its uneventful annexation of Albania, Italy engaged in a series of provocations in the hope of inciting a forceful Greek reaction, and thus a convenient pretext for an attack on Greece. These involved regular incursions into Greek airspace, air attacks against Greek merchant shipping and Hellenic Royal Navy (HRN) warships, and unfounded allegations of breaches of Greece's neutrality in the form of covert cooperation with Great Britain. Italian provocations reached their peak on 15 August 1940, when the submarine *Delfino*, operating out of a base on the Aegean island of Leros, torpedoed and sank the HRN destroyer *Elli* lying at anchor off the port of Tinos while its crew attended a religious festival; this attack killed nine HRN crewmen and one civilian. Still anxious to avoid a conflict with Italy, the repressive regime of prime minister and retired Army general Ioannis Metaxas feigned ignorance of the attacker's identity, despite the recovery of remains of Italian-made torpedoes. It was only on 30 October 1940, two days after the outbreak of the Greek–Italian War, that the Greek authorities identified Italy as being responsible for the attack. The unprovoked sinking of this warship was Greece's 'Pearl Harbour moment', and the desire to avenge its loss accounted in no small part for Greece's unity of purpose during the ensuing conflict with Italy.

HRAF officers, wearing an assortment of uniforms and flying clothing, pose next to a venerable Breguet 19 reconnaissance-bomber; the M1908/16 closed-collar tunics and (second left) the French-style *képi* date this scene to the pre-war years. On 2 November 1940 Sgt Katsoulas and PO Karakitsos were flying a Breguet 19 when they detected the lead columns of the invading 'Julia' Alpine Div close to the village of Samarina north-east of Ioannina. (© War Museum, Athens)

CHRONOLOGY

1940:

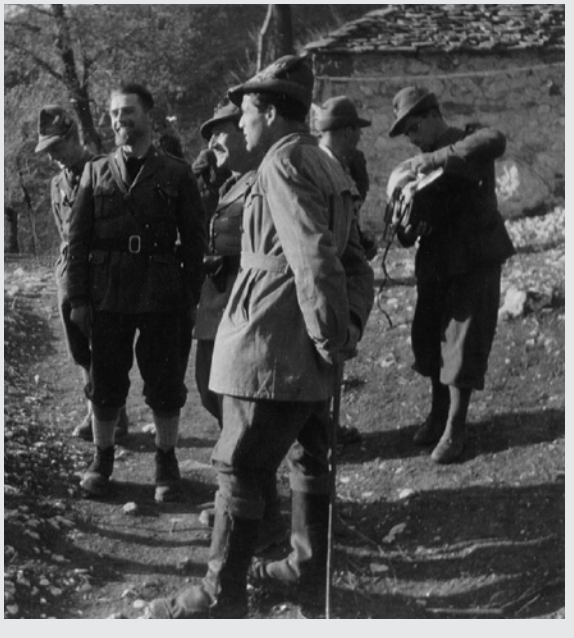
28 October Grazzi, Italy's ambassador to Athens, delivers to Greek Prime Minister Metaxas a three-hour ultimatum, which the latter rejects outright. Italyopens hostilities before the ultimatum's expiry.

1 November Italian forces capture the town of Konitsa (see map, page 7). Greek troops led by Col Davakis withdraw, only to launch a counter-attack on the invaders' left flank.

2 November Italian troops aided by Albanian auxiliaries capture Grambala and the village of Vovoussa. The Greek VIII Inf Div checks the invaders along the Kalpakion (Elaia)–Kalamas defensive line.

3 November The first few Bristol Blenheim light bombers and Gloster Gladiator biplane fighters from the RAF's Nos. 30 and 80 Sqns arrive at Athens/Elefsis to support Greece's war effort.

4–5 November Igoumenitsa (Goumenissa) is captured and looted by Italy's Albanian auxiliaries.



Officers of Gen Mario Girotti's 3rd Alpine Div 'Julia', which spearheaded the Italian advance in the Pindus Mountains with the objective of seizing the strategic Metsovon Pass, roughly 30 miles ENE of Ioannina. The division made early progress against the desperate resistance of the Greek 51st Inf Regt, but were then stopped and nearly encircled by the Greek I Inf Div and other Greek forces, suffering heavy casualties in the first week of November 1940. The nearest officer is wearing the popular 'windcheater' overjacket of light brown canvas with leather reinforcement on the shoulders; this example seems to be cut in *'sahariana'* style on the upper chest and back. (Private collection)

6 November The 'Julia' Alpine Div comes under intense pressure from the Greek I Inf Div (Maj Gen Vrahnos) and Greek cavalry units, and is forced to retreat, thwarting an Italian attempt to outflank the Greek defences from the east. RAF Blenheims bomb Italian shipping in the port of Sarandë (Agioi Saranda/Santi Quaranta/Porto Edda), and attack Italian airfields at Tepelenë (Tepeleni), Gijrokastër (Argyrokastron/ Argirocastro) and Vlorë (Avlon/Valona).

7–9 November The Greek Army recaptures Grambala, opening an all-out counter-attack. General Viscount Prasca, C-in-C Italian forces in Albania, is relieved of his command, and replaced by Gen Ubaldo Soddu.

14–15 November The Greek Army breaks through the Italian positions along the Prespa Lakes, in the tri-border area WNW of Florina, definitively ejecting the Italian Army from Greek territory. End of the defensive stage of Greek operations on this Epirus front.

16–22 November Following the Morava–Ivan offensive by IX and X Inf Divs and IV Ing Bde south of Korçë (Korytsa/ Koriza/ Corcie) Greek troops take that town. A Blenheim from HRAF 32nd Bomber Sqn (PO Malakis and Sgt-Chief Polychroniades) attacks Italian fuel and ammunition dumps in Permet (Premeti/ Permeti) **(20th).**

26 November Marshal Badoglio, Italian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, resigns his appointment.

30 November–1 December Greek troops capture the town of Pogradec (Ochrid Lake).

3 December Greek troops capture Permet.

6–7 December Greek troops capture the port of Sarandë, Delvino and Gjirokastër.

22 December Greek troops capture Himarë (Himarra), on the coast west of Gjirokastër.

22–24 December HRN submarine Y-2 *Papanikolis* (Lt Cdr Iatrides) crosses the Strait of Otranto and sinks the Italian ship *Antonietta* **(22nd),** the troopship *Firenze* off Sazan (Saseno) Island **(23rd)**, and three other Italian transports off the Albanian port of Vlorë **(24th)**.

25 December The Italian Air Force bombs the city of Corfu, killing 18 and wounding 25 civilians. Blenheims of RAF No. 211 Sqn launch retaliatory raid on Vlorë.

29 December Submarine Y-3 *Proteus* (Lt Cdr Hadjikonstantis) sinks Italian passenger ship *Sardegna*, but is rammed and sunk by Italian torpedo boat *Antares*, with the loss of its entire crew. Gen Soddu is relieved of his command, and replaced by Gen Ugo Cavallero.

31 December Submarine Y-1 *Katsonis* (Lt Cdr Spanides) sinks Italian freighter *Quinto* off Albanian port of Durrës (Dyrrahion/ Durazzo).

1941:

10–11 January Greek I, XV and XI Inf Divs capture town of Këlcyrë (Kleissoura/ Klisura), with the strategically important Kleissoura Pass and Hill 1890. Italian 7th 'Lupi di Toscana' Div is virtually annihilated.

29 January Prime Minister Metaxas dies, and is replaced by Bank of Greece governor Alexandros Koryzis.
12 February Italian air raids on Piraeus and Thessaloniki.
13–15 February The Greek V Inf Div captures the Medjigorani Pass and Mt Shëndelli (on the coast due west of Delvinë). With its logistics overstretched, the Greek Army has now exhausted its offensive capabilities, as heavy snowfall brings operations to a virtual standstill.
23 February 15 HRAF machines clash with 12 Italian aircraft over Permet, for the loss of three Italian against two HRAF aircraft. The Greek submarine Y-4 *Nireus* (Lt Cdr Rotas) reports sinking an Italian freighter in the Adriatic.
28 February Flying from Paramythia, 40 RAF Gloster Gladiator and Hawker Hurricane fighters clash with 60 *Regia Aeronautica* machines, claiming 27 Italian aircraft against seven RAF losses.
2 March Mussolini arrives in Albania to inspect his troops.
9 March The Italian Army launches its *Primavera* (Spring) offensive along the Kleissoura Pass. Italian troops recapture Himarë, but fail to dislodge the Greeks from other positions.
14 March HRN destroyer *Psara* reports the possible sinking of an Italian submarine off Falkonera.
21 March Mussolini returns to Italy. The *Primavera* offensive peters out, ending on 26 March without any palpable results, at a cost of more than 12,000 Italian and an estimated 5,500 Greek casualties.
23 March Submarine Y-5 *Triton* (Lt Cdr Zeppos) torpedoes Italian steamer *Carnia* off Brindisi.
28–29 March Sea battle of Cape Matapan, south of Crete, with the participation of RAF aircraft operating from Greece. RN Mediterranean Fleet (Adml Sir Andrew Cunningham) sinks three Italian heavy cruisers and two destroyers for minimal loss.
6 April Hitler declares war on Yugoslavia and Greece, launching Operation 'Marita' from Bulgarian territory by the reinforced Twelfth Army (Gen Ewald von Kleist) against both countries simultaneously.

Aftermath:
The German invasion, 6–27 April

The bulk of the Greek forces – the Epirus Army Section or First Army – had been committed to Albania, with only few defences facing allied Yugoslavia immediately to the east of the Albanian front, leaving it vulnerable to being outflanked. The long Bulgarian border in the north-east was protected by about 30 fortified positions in the 110-mile Metaxas Line, but this was defended only by the VII, XIV and XVIII Inf Divs of the Eastern Macedonia Army Section, or Second Army (Lt Gen Konstantinos Bakopoulos), whose 70,000-odd men were only about one-third of the number required.

Behind and between these two armies a second line, oriented from north-west to south-east astride the Aliakmon river from roughly Florina to Mt Olympus, via Kozani, was designed to prevent an enemy penetration in Macedonia from sweeping west and south into the rest of Greece. This was held by the British and Empire 'W Force' (Gen Sir Henry Maitland Wilson), with two-plus divisions of mainly ANZAC troops who still awaited much of their transport and heavy equipment, together with the Greek XII and XX Inf Divs of the Central Macedonia Army Section.

Early on 6 April, German motorized forces from Bulgaria invaded south-eastern Yugoslavia and hooked southwards towards the strategic town of Monastir (on map= Bitola); a simultaneous thrust westwards linked up with the Italians in Albania, while the bulk of the Twelfth Army hit the Metaxas Line southwards on a broad front. Despite the heroic defence of its positions (e.g. Fort Rupel, held by some 950 men under Maj Georgios Douratsos from XIV Inf Div), the Metaxas Line was broken, and on 9 April German armour reached the strategic port of Thessaloniki; the following day the Greek Second Army was obliged to surrender.

A German advance from Monastir/Bitola captured the Florina-Vevi pass on 11 April, threatening to outflank the Aliakmon Line. The Greeks were still fighting inside Albania, but with resources and morale dwindling the Epirus (First) Army were obliged to withdraw southwards from 12 April, hesitantly followed by the Italians. On 14 April a stubborn Greek defence of Metsovon Pass NE of Ioannina was overwhelmed. On 18 April, the Germans cut W Force off from Greek First Army, and Gen Wilson began a withdrawal to Thermopylae (on the same day, Prime Minister Koryzis committed suicide). On the 19th the evacuation of W Force was agreed; the following day Lt Gen Georgios Tsolakoglou surrendered First Army to Josef 'Sepp' Dietrich's LSSAH motorized brigade.

On the 22nd, pursued by Panzer and Mountain units, the British evacuation began; on the 23rd the Greek Chief of Staff Gen Papagos resigned, and the king and his government left the country, eventually for British-occupied Egypt. The ANZAC rearguard held out at Thermopylae until nightfall on the 24th before falling back to a final position south of Thebes. On the 25th a German airborne attempt to seize the bridges over the Corinth Canal narrowly failed, and the last RAF aircraft left the country. On the morning of 27 April the first German units entered Athens. The following day the last Empire troops to escape left ports in the eastern Peloponnese for Crete, leaving some 8,000 others to be captured.

On 20 May 1941 the Germans launched their costly but successful airborne and seaborne invasion of Crete, from which the last Allied troops to escape had been shipped out for Egypt by 1 June.

* * *

On 9 June, Hitler's Directive No. 31 divided Greece between a German, an Italian and a Bulgarian zone of occupation. The Greek population would suffer extreme privations, and merciless reprisals for their resistance, until October 1944, by which time hundreds of thousands of civilians are known to have died.

OVERVIEW OF THE OPPOSING FORCES

Italy's invasion and subsequent annexation of Albania, in conjunction with its constant pre-war provocations, had alerted the Greek authorities to the imminent threat. This threat was corroborated by local intelligence, as well as by information about Italy's plans, which reached the Metaxas government through diplomatic channels. As a result, the Italian invasion

Smartly-dressed Italian officers, most of them *Alpini,* pose for a group photo on the Albanian front; the winter has not yet closed in. All wear the M40 regulation uniform, with all-grey collars and lapels, although the man standing second from right has a noticeably pale tunic that contrasts not only with his comrades' uniforms but also with his own breeches. Second left, note again the canvas double-breasted overjacket, here with silver Savoy stars pinned to its collar. (Private collection)

January 1941: Greek soldiers pose with a captured Italian Fiat-Ansaldo M13/40 tank disabled and captured near Këlcyrë. Previously equipped with tankettes, the 31st Tank Regt, 131st Armd Div 'Centauro' received its first M13/40s in December 1940, but lost a considerable number only a month later during the fighting for the strategic Kleissoura Pass. The mountainous terrain and boggy river valleys of the Albanian/Greek borderlands prevented the *Regio Esercito* from fully exploiting its superiority in motorized and mechanized equipment. (© War Museum, Athens)

lacked the element of surprise. By 28 October 1940 the Greek Army fielded one fully mobilized infantry division (the VIII) along the Greek–Albanian border. Supported by other *ad hoc* formations, this division would hold the Italian advance until sufficient forces had been raised for a counteroffensive.

Preparations on the Italian side left much to be desired. The proposed start of the invasion (which was to coincide with the 18th anniversary of Mussolini's 'March to Rome') interfered with the annual harvest; consequently, only days before the start of operations the Italian military had demobilized 500,000 men to make up for shortages of agricultural labour. Partly on account of this, the Regio Esercito was to go to war with only eight of the 20 infantry divisions that Marshal Badoglio deemed necessary for the success of the enterprise. The Italian Army still enjoyed a near 2.5:1 advantage over the defenders on 28 October 1940 (some 95,000 Italian troops against 36,000 Greeks). However, the Greek Army proved able to mobilize reservists swiftly, and to bring to bear forces which, given the relatively limited length of the mountainous front, matched those of the invaders. In November 1940, Greece had a formidable force of 20 divisions (250,000 men) to hold a relatively contained front against an ill-prepared and under-resourced aggressor.

A battle-weary group of Italian soldiers, including a *Bersagliero* (left), an MVSN 'Blackshirt' militiaman (centre right), and several *Alpini.* (Private collection)

In addition, the Albanian Adriatic Sea ports of Durrës and Vlorë, through which Italy was to transport and supply its invasion force, lacked sufficient capacity and infrastructure for this task; they were also vulnerable to sea and air attacks, and had poor road connections to the front. Finally, the military intelligence on which Italy went to war would prove fundamentally flawed: Greece's armed forces were better equipped than the Italian High Command had led Mussolini to believe; Greek soldiers did not surrender or desert *en masse*, as many on the Italian side seem to have expected; the Greek government did not collapse; nor did Bulgaria join the fight on Italy's side, as some in Mussolini's entourage had predicted.

Nevertheless, the material weaknesses of the Greek Army (especially in terms of motor vehicles and armour), and its finite human resources, were ultimately to work in Italy's favour. By late January 1941 the Italians had rushed enough reinforcements to the front to negate any further Greek push deeper into Albanian territory, imposing a stalemate that was to last until April 1941. Devoid of armour and motorized logistics, and unable to exert control over the Albanian skies, the Greek Army was unable to capitalize on its successful land offensive during the first two months of the conflict. Lacking mechanized assets, the Greek Army avoided the flat corridor along the Devoll (Deboli) river so as not to expose its left flank to the risk of an attack from Italian armour. Instead, Greek forces were forced to manoeuvre through meandering, snow-covered and barely accessible mountain passes (often under the cover of darkness), only reaching their jump-off positions after taxing marches. Italian air superiority helped consolidate the Italian Army's position, containing the Greek forces within a relatively narrow slice of Albanian territory about 30 to 50km (18–31 miles) deep running along the pre-war Greek–Albanian border.

Finally, a few words on the morale of the opposing forces are apposite. Both Greek wartime propaganda and post-war Italian assessments of the Greek–Italian War systematically belittled the psychological resilience of the average Italian soldier, while exaggerating the fighting prowess and natural aggressiveness of his average Greek opponent. Most first-hand witnesses to the conflict agree that the overwhelming majority of soldiers on both sides displayed bravery, tenacity and determination, both in attack and in defence. The comparable number of casualties sustained by the two sides testifies to their parity in terms of fighting spirit, and to the resolve of their rank-and-file throughout the conflict. The reasons for the poor performance of the Regio Esercito should instead be sought in more objective judgments, including its limited battle-readiness, the poor quality of its leadership, and its lack of familiarity with the difficult terrain.

Hellenic Land Army officers (centre and left foreground, wearing pre-1938 closed-collar tunics, a greatcoat, and forage caps) pose with their men amid the wreckage of a shot-down Italian aircraft. The relationship between the ranks is obviously relaxed.

Despite the Greek Army's acute logistical weaknesses, its morale remained high until the German invasion of April 1941. That it was able to maintain its fighting momentum was largely due to the efforts of the indigenous Greek population of northern Epirus/ southern Albania, who volunteered to carry food, medical and military supplies along sinuous routes in exceptionally bad weather, and to clear snow or debris from the rudimentary mountain roads and paths during the winter months. (© War Museum, Athens)

Although undated, this photo probably shows troops involved in the suppression of the attempted coup of 1 March 1935. The soldier in the foreground displays the pre-1938 diagonal rank bar of a senior private on his greatcoat forearms, and the mounted man has branch-coloured collar tabs complete with a metal unit number. Note the varying appearance of the forage caps and lengths of the greatcoats. (© War Museum, Athens)

THE GREEK ARMY

The legacy of the Greek–Turkish War

The aftermath of the Greek–Turkish War of 1919–22 found the Kingdom of Greece in a state of near ruin.[1] Public finances reflected the ravages of a decade of armed conflict dating back to the Balkan Wars, while socio-political tensions ran high. The first reason for these was the deep divide between Royalists and Liberals, exacerbated by the disastrous outcome of the Greek–Turkish War. The second was the consequent pressing need to resettle, feed and integrate over a million destitute Greek refugees expelled from Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace following Greece's defeat at the hands of Kemal Atatürk's Nationalist Army. The third was the constant interference of the Greek Army in domestic political affairs. As a result, following the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) most Greek governments would prove unwilling or unable to devote the resources necessary to modernize the country's armed forces.

The five major wars it had fought between 1912 and 1922 had left the Greek Army with a motley collection of largely obsolete equipment, dangerously close to the end of its operational life. Shortages in AA and AT weapons, modern artillery, mortars and vehicles were acute; it is telling of the Army's parlous state that mortars were only purchased in 1930 (a token ten tubes, with 25 shells per tube). Except for the acquisition or manufacture of artillery, small arms and personal equipment during the short dictatorial tenure of Gen Pangalos (1925–26), and French assistance in the form of a training mission, little was done between 1923 and 1935 to retrain and re-equip the Greek Army for a modern war. Only a fraction of the nominally available manpower could be armed and kitted out due to shortages in both small arms and personal equipment, while much of the available weaponry was defective, often for lack of essential spares and accessories. For instance, most of the 1,752 Hotchkiss 7.92mm machine guns purchased from France in 1926 were delivered without sights or spare parts; over half of the 2,300 Saint-Étienne M07 machine guns in stock were dysfunctional, and only a few dozen of the Schwarzlose and Maxim guns at the Army's disposal were operational.

At the organizational level, the only reforms introduced during 1923–35 were the establishment of an Army General Staff; the assignment of responsibility to a dedicated Minister of Military Affairs assisted by the Army Chief of Staff; and the reorganization into four army corps, with a peacetime composition of 11 infantry divisions, two cavalry brigades and one Air Force command. It was not until late 1935, following the assumption of dictatorial powers by Metaxas and against the background

1 See MAA 501, *Armies of the Greek–Turkish War 1919–22*.

of rising international tensions, that systematic efforts were made to reverse the decay of the armed forces. The challenges faced by Metaxas (who doubled as Prime Minister and Minister of Military Affairs), and Gen Alexandros Papagos (Army Chief of Staff, 1935–41) were immense.

Artillery officers or NCOs using a newly acquired range-finder; the purchase of modern equipment in 1936-40 paid dividends during the Greek–Italian War. These men wear long, hooded, sleeveless *fakirs* as snow camouflage. (© War Museum, Athens)

Rearmament, 1935–40

Defence spending was increased five-fold between 1936 and 1940. The purchase from Germany of 24x 8.8cm Krupp AA guns, 162x 20mm and 3.7cm Rheinmetall AA and 24x 3.7cm AT guns was paid for in cash. Given the foreign powers' unwillingness to equip the Greek Army with AT weapons, dozens of 75mm M1919/24 Schneider mountain guns were domestically converted, as was their ammunition, for anti-tank use. Artillery fire-control systems were purchased, and old artillery pieces were repaired (including 110x inter-war 65mm mountain guns, which were destined to provide infantry regiments with devastating close-support weapons during the Greek–Italian War). France sold Greece 313x 81mm Stokes-Brandt mortars to equip infantry regiments (on a scale of four tubes per regiment). Progress was also made towards the acquisition or manufacture of quantities of small arms, ammunition and other basic military equipment sufficient for a fighting force of 450,000 men.

Sufficient steel helmets were manufactured to supply the Army's needs at mobilization strength. Strategic reserves of munitions and other basic supplies were established. Army uniforms and personal equipment, including belts and pouches, field blankets, water canteens, mess tins and entrenching tools were also manufactured *en masse*. Orders were placed

Cheerful soldiers pose with a radio set and power generator. Pre-war shortages of telecommunications equipment were so acute that in 1936 the Army had only a handful of functioning wireless sets. Note that the operator with his hand on the Morse key displays corporal's sleeve chevrons, and men at the left wear long woollen stockings in place of puttees. (© War Museum, Athens)

for, and deliveries received of telecommunications equipment, including field telephones, wireless radio and telegraphy sets, as well as engineering matériel (until 1936 the Army only possessed a single, dysfunctional set of bridge-laying equipment dating back to the Balkan Wars, and only a handful of functioning radio sets). Orders were also placed for an additional 92x AA guns from Germany, 36x AT guns from Italy, and 14x Vickers Light 6–7 ton tanks from Britain – of which none were delivered before the outbreak of hostilities, however. Of the 1,786x 14mm (5.5in) Boys AT rifles ordered from Britain only a token few had been delivered by the start of the conflict.

Thanks to the Greek authorities' concerted efforts throughout the late 1930s, the Army would go to war against Italy with an arsenal of some 459,650 rifles, 4,900 machine guns, 12,200 sub-machine guns, 320 mortars, 900 artillery pieces (mostly 105mm M1919/24 Schneider, 85mm M1925 Schneider, 75mm M1919/24 Schneider, and 75mm M1915 Škoda), 190 AA guns, 24 dedicated AT guns, 1,350,000 artillery shells of all calibres, as well as rations to last 50 days, fuel for 45 days, and animal fodder for 30 days.

Reorganization, 1935-40

Significant organizational reforms were also introduced. A Supreme War Council, a Supreme Military Council and a Supreme National Defence Council were established in 1935; the General Staff underwent reforms, with the appointment of three Vice-Chiefs of Staff to assist the Army Chief of Staff by coordinating the work of the separate branches of the armed forces. By 1939 the peacetime composition of the Land Army had also been revised upwards, to the tune of five army corps with 14 infantry divisions and one cavalry division. Post-mobilization, in November 1940 the Land Army fielded no fewer than 20 infantry divisions (totalling 56 infantry regiments), plus five infantry brigades, one cavalry division and one cavalry brigade – a fighting force of some 450,000 men, the largest in the history of modern Greece.

Finally, substantial resources were diverted to the construction of an extensive network of permanent reinforced-concrete fortifications and defence works known as the 'Metaxas Line', mostly in Eastern Macedonia and Western Thrace along the Greek–Bulgarian border. This investment may have acted as a deterrent against a parallel attack on Greece in 1940 by Bulgaria, thus releasing resources for urgent use against the Italian invaders.

The crew of a 3.7cm anti-aircraft gun pose for the camera; note that a man on the left still wears the old Adrian helmet. AA battalions, with mixed equipment of between 8.8cm and 20mm purchased from Germany, were an army corps asset. (© War Museum, Athens).

Organization: regiments, divisions and army corps

At the outbreak of the war in 1940, Greek infantry regiments consisted of three battalions (each with 58 officers and 1,000–1,100 enlisted men), plus a heavy weapons company and a mounted reconnaissance platoon. Personal weapons aside, regimental armament consisted of 2x 65mm mountain guns (max. range 6,500m);

Officers and men of an unidentified artillery unit pose with two of the elderly but trusted Austro-Hungarian 75mm M15 Škoda mountain guns used by some Greek divisional artillery regiments. Despite their obsolete equipment the Greek artillery arm performed very effectively in 1940–41, including against Italian armour. While outnumbered, they were not outclassed; the *Regio Esercito* also went to war with large numbers of old Austrian pieces acquired as reparations in 1919. (© War Museum, Athens)

4x 81mm mortars (max. range 2,800m); 8x heavy machine guns; 36x LMGs; up to 108 sub-machine guns; and 108x M1886/93 Lebel rifle-mounted grenade launchers *(tromblons)*. Regiments were identified by Arabic numbers, but these did not run in a single continuous sequence. The three elite Evzone regiments of mountain assault infantry were, somewhat confusingly, identified by a dual number: the first digit indicated their seniority within their branch, and the second was their regular infantry regimental number.[2]

Divisions were numbered sequentially with Latin numerals, but they were also known by a name indicating their geographical area of recruitment – e.g., V Infantry Division (Cretan). The Army fielded three main types of divisions during the Greek–Italian War. Infantry Divisions (of which there were 20 in total) each consisted of three infantry regiments; one divisional artillery regiment of nine four-gun batteries (36 guns); one divisional reconnaissance squadron composed of two cavalry companies (total, 400 troopers); one sapper company; two signals companies; and one logistical support company. Divisional strength was about 14,000 men. The similarly structured and equipped Mountain Divisions had only 12,000 men, and six artillery batteries. The single Cavalry Division consisted of two cavalry regiments (each composed of four battalions); one mounted artillery battalion (12 guns); one mounted machine-gun battalion (36 MGs); one engineer company; and one signals company.

A Mechanized Division (numbered XIX) was established on paper in early 1941, but it did not take part in the operations against the Italians. It would have been composed of three regiments (each with one lorry-borne infantry regiment, 9x Italian light tanks, and up to 25x British tracked carriers); one artillery battalion; one AT company, and one AA company.

2 The three Evzone regiments in existence at the outbreak of the war were the 2/39 Regt (Missolongi), 3/40 Regt (Arta), and 5/42 Regt (Lamia).

At army corps level, the first four corps (lettered sequentially 'A' Alpha, 'B' Beta, 'C' Gamma and 'D' Delta) organically comprised, beside a fluctuating number of infantry divisions: one heavy artillery regiment with seven batteries (28 guns); one field artillery regiment; one AA battalion (with a mixed armament of 8.8cm, 3.7cm and 20mm guns); one AT company (with 8x 13.2mm Hotchkiss machine guns); and one bridging company. 'D' Army Corps additionally had a mountain artillery regiment. A fifth 'E' Epsilon Army Corps would field three additional artillery battalions: one heavy, one field, and one AA. Each corps also had one mounted reconnaissance squadron of two cavalry companies.

Hellenic Land Army Order of Battle, Greek–Albanian border, 27 October 1940

Southern (Epirus) sector:
'A' Army Corps, consisting of VIII Inf Div (Maj Gen Katsimitros) & III Inf Bde, supported by infantry, mountain and field artillery elements.
Central (Pindus) sector (between Grammos and Smolikas mountains):
'Pindus Detachment' (Col Davakis): three infantry battalions, supported by one mountain artillery company, one cavalry troop, one border protection company (detached from VIII Inf Div) and one pack company; Cavalry Div (Maj Gen Stanotas); Cav Bde (Col Demaratos).
Western Macedonia sector (from Prespa Lakes to Grammos mountains, inclusive):
Western Macedonia Tactical Group (Lt Gen Pitsikas), consisting of 'B' and 'C' Army Corps:

'B' Army Corps: I and IX Inf Divs, V Inf Bde, plus 9a Border Sector (one infantry battalion)

'C' Army Corps: IV, X and XI Inf Divs, plus 9, 10 & 11 Border Sectors (three infantry battalions).
Metsovon area:
One infantry battalion, supported by one field artillery company.
Preveza area:
One infantry battalion, supported by one field artillery company.
Corfu:
10th Inf Regt, supported by one field artillery company.

Character: conscripts, and the officer corps

In common with most European nations at that time, Greece had a conscript army. Conscription was on the basis of age classes, with all able-bodied males expected to serve for 24 months after their 18th birthday. At the time of the outbreak of the war Greece was a relatively poor and underdeveloped country, with an agriculture-based economy. Army conscripts largely hailed from modest, rural backgrounds, and tended to be undemanding, disciplined, and physically fit for military exertions. Discipline was strictly enforced, while the level of training in marksmanship and basic infantry tactics was adequate. Training had intensified in the run-up to the start of hostilities, through the participation of conscripts and reservists alike in unit-level as well as in medium and larger-scale manoeuvres.

Greek Army commissioned officers *(Mónimoi Axiomatikoì)* were traditionally drawn from the more affluent segments of the middle class, both because the pursuit of a professional military career involved substantial financial outlay (by way of Military Academy tuition fees), and

because the Army's role in national politics throughout contemporary Greek history made it a natural magnet for ambitious young men. However, by the time of the outbreak of hostilities several leading officers had achieved seniority after promotion from the ranks. Army officers were often veterans of several conflicts (including the two Balkan Wars, World War I, the Southern Russia Campaign, and the Greek–Turkish War), while both Prime Minister Metaxas and Gen Papagos were graduates of distinguished foreign military academies, with proven records of military competence including at staff level. The internecine conflict between the Liberals (i.e. the followers of former Prime Minister Venizelos, modern Greece's most important political figure) and the Royalists would deprive the Army of around 1,500 competent officers, including those dismissed following a failed coup on 1 March 1935. Only a handful of these would be recalled or reinstated in time to participate in the Greek–Italian War.

Mention should be made of the key role played in the conflict by cadet officers *(Dókimoi Éfedroi Axiomatikoì)*. The numerous cadet officers who served in 1940-41 represented a cross-section of Greek society. Thanks to their mixed social background and education they were better able to associate with and lead the younger, less experienced and less educated soldiers in their platoons and companies. Alongside recalled reservist officers, cadets bore the brunt of the ground war at company level, upholding a long tradition of sterling service dating back to 1888.

Studio portrait of Lt Alexandros Diakos, the first Hellenic Land Army officer to lay down his life for his country during the Greek–Italian War. He was killed in action on 1 November 1940 while leading an attack by 2nd Co, 4th Inf Bn on Tsouka Hill in the Pindus sector, during the first desperate days when scattered units and sub-units had to be committed piecemeal.

Here he wears the smart British-style M1938 winter service uniform in olive-khaki, with rank stars on his shoulder straps, and buttoned Infantry-red collar tabs with the flaming grenade device of the combat arms. The cloth-peaked service cap displays a large Royal crown above an ornate national cockade. (© War Museum, Athens)

UNIFORMS & INSIGNIA

Greek infantry soldiers *(Hoplìtes)* went to war wearing the M1938-pattern khaki-green (olive) uniform, a slightly modified version of the pre-World War I M1908 pattern. The latter had seen the Army ditch its colourful 'blue' uniforms (modelled after those worn in the Danish Royal Army of the late 19th century) in favour of more subdued ones consistent with the needs of modern warfare. Officers would retain 'blues' for ceremonial purposes only.[3]

The Greek foot soldier's uniform consisted of a single-breasted woollen tunic dyed either brick-brown or greenish khaki, lined in cotton, with a fall collar and plain shoulder straps *(epomìdes)*; five plain brass front buttons; two pleated patch breast pockets and two larger unpleated skirt pockets, both with straight buttoned flaps; and a single pleat in the rear of the skirt. The 'semi-breeches' trousers reaching below the knee were of matching khaki cloth, and were confined by khaki puttees; the laced, hobnailed ankle boots were brown or, less commonly, black. The standard headgear was the M1917 forage cap (similar in style to the co he M1908

3 For the development of the pre-war M1908/15-pattern campaign uniforms of Greek Army officers, see MAAs 356, 466 & 501. The Greek Royal Family traced its origins to the Danish House of Glücksburg.

khaki-green single-breasted overcoat, with five plain brass front buttons. This had a plain turn-down collar and plain shoulder straps; slanting, flapped, external hip pockets; and an adjustable rear half-belt with three brass buttons. (For basic uniform details see Plates B1, B3 and C1). Period photographs suggest that the battlefield appearance of NCOs and troops, in particular, was fairly uniform, but nevertheless garments might vary both in exact colour and in details of cut. During manoeuvres, collarless heavy cotton twill overalls were often worn over the uniform to protect it from wear-and-tear.

The elite Evzone regiments' wartime uniform, which incorporated elements of the traditional national costume in parts of mainland Greece, was visibly different (see Plate B2). It consisted of a khaki frock coat *(doulamàs),* worn over a long, exposed shirt of which the lower end resembled a kilt *(foustanélla);* a French Zouave-style low-profile khaki cap *(fárion)* with a long black tassel (often removed when in action) and a white-metal crowned national cockade; either baggy khaki pantaloons or tight woollen stockings worn with garters, and traditional mountaineers' hobnailed shoes *(tsarouhia),* occasionally complete with decorative black pompons.

Commissioned (as well as cadet and reserve) officers wore a smarter service dress uniform, very similar both in cut and colour to that of their British Army counterparts, complete with a 'Sam Browne'-type belt. The M1938 service dress consisted of a greenish (or brownish) khaki single-breasted, open-collar tunic, with six gilt front buttons embossed with a stylized flaming grenade (as were those of their overcoat), and two small buttons on the rear of the false cuff, which had a pointed upper seam. The tunic featured two pleated patch breast pockets with scalloped, buttoned flaps, and two larger, unpleated patch skirt pockets with straight buttoned flaps. It was worn over a greenish-khaki shirt and a khaki or paler beige woollen necktie. Officers' breeches were either matching khaki or beige-coloured, worn with either riding boots, or leather leggings combined with laced ankle boots (see Plate D2). The headgear was a British-style peaked (visored) cap in khaki, with gold embroidery on a lacquered brown leather peak for field and general officers; it bore the Royal Crown and cockade in silver or, for higher-ranking officers, gold metallic thread. Only Military Academy students *(Evélpides)* and members of the Royal Gendarmerie *(Vassilikì Chorofylakì)* retained the traditional *képi*, though this was also worn as part of the ceremonial 'blue' uniform (see Plates D3 and D1). While in the field, officers (especially of junior ranks) would often sport forage caps similar in cut to the enlisted-ranks' pattern but of better quality. The officers' overcoat was usually double-breasted, with two rows of six gilt buttons, turn-back cuffs and a turn-down collar; general

These two career sergeants are identifiable, under magnification, by three gold sleeve chevrons edged in arm-of-service colour. The collared, sleeveless, black leather jerkins favoured by mounted troops, and their riding breeches and boots, suggest that the edging would be in either Cavalry dark green or Artillery black, and a dark tab is just visible on the right-hand NCO's tunic collar. Note that they wear 'Sam Browne' belts, as the enlisted ranks of mounted arms were issued with swords. (© War Museum, Athens)

officers' regulation coats had scarlet lapel lining (see Plate A1). Officers were also issued with crotch-length frock-type M1908-pattern coats.

Troopers serving with cavalry units wore khaki tunics with breeches and riding boots (or leather leggings and ankle boots), but the same cap as the infantrymen. Cavalry officers were uniformed largely as their Infantry counterparts, but often wore a black leather jerkin or coat over their tunic, especially when acting as reconnaissance troops.

Insignia of rank and arm of service

Rank was indicated on the shoulder straps for officers (regulars and reservists) and sergeant-adjutants *(Anthypaspistès);* and on the upper sleeves for NCOs *(Ypaxiomatikoi)*, by British-style downward-pointing chevrons of 2cm braid. However, older-pattern diagonal bars on the lower sleeves were still seen in use, especially early in the war; these were of 7mm braid for senior privates *(Ypodekaneis)* and 2cm for corporals, sergeants and colour-sergeants. The chevrons of conscript NCOs were made of white or yellow braid, without edging; those of regular NCOs were of gold braid edged with arm-of-service colour. Rank insignia were as listed in the panel below.

Arm of service was indicated by coloured collar tabs, pointed at the rear or top; by coloured distinctions on some ranks' shoulder straps (see panel), and by the coloured edging of career NCOs' chevrons. The main colours were red (Infantry), black (Artillery), dark green (Cavalry), dark blue (Signals), crimson (Engineers), crimson velvet (Medical), and light blue (Train – i.e. the logistics branch). Officers below general rank serving in the Infantry, Artillery, Cavalry or Engineers wore a gilt button above a stylized gilt flaming grenade on their tunic and overcoat collar tabs. General officers of all branches wore a stylized oak leaf on bright red collar tabs on the tunic and overcoat.

Uniform regulations notwithstanding, photographs show that the tunics and overcoats of NCOs and rank-and-file in the field very often lacked the coloured collar tabs, and even when worn they rarely bore the regulation metal unit numbers.

Army officers and a warrant officer in the field. With their M1938 uniforms, of slightly varying shades of greenish and brownish khaki, the officers wear forage caps like their men. They display on their open-collared tunics the standard branch-colour collar tabs with a gilt button above a gilt grenade badge. So does a cadet officer (second right), on his fall collar opened over a shirt and tie, and under magnification double piping can just be made out along his shoulder straps. The sergeant-adjutant (far right) has a plain tab on his closed fall collar, and a stripe of arm-of-service colour across his shoulder strap. (© War Museum, Athens)

Greek Army basic rank insignia, 1940

Senior private	One 7mm upper sleeve chevron
NCOs	One to three 2cm upper sleeve chevrons
Sergeant-adjutant	One stripe in arm-of-service colour across shoulder straps
Cadet officers	Single or double arm-of-service colour piping along shoulder straps
Company officers	One to three six-point silver metal stars on shoulder straps
Field officers	Royal Crown and one to three six-point gold metal stars on shoulder straps; single border of gold embroidery on lacquered cap peak
General officers	Royal Cypher, crossed sword and baton, and one to three six-point silver metal stars on shoulder straps; double border of gold embroidery on lacquered cap peak

Junior NCOs of the Royal Gendarmerie, whose old-pattern uniform was grey with silver buttons and diagonal sleeve ranking (see Plate D3). The main distinctions were blue-black shoulder straps, matching tabs on the stand-and-fall collar, and white aiguilettes on the left shoulder. In the front line these men wear helmets instead of their trademark *képi*. Although the Greek helmet shared the same shell with the Italian M33/34 model, under magnification the left-hand gendarme can be seen to wear a captured Italian helmet with the black-stencilled infantry badge. (© War Museum, Athens)

Royal Gendarmerie

This was a militarized police organization modelled on its French equivalent, established at the time of the enthronement of King Otto of the Hellenes in 1833. The Gendarmerie was charged with auxiliary military tasks, including prisoner escort and rear-area security. They wore a grey woollen M1919-pattern tunic, with a single row of six white-metal front buttons featuring a stylized Royal Crown. It had a stand-and-fall collar; pleated patch breast pockets with scalloped, buttoned flaps; and two larger unpleated skirt pockets with straight buttoned flaps. Gendarmerie distinctions were blue-black collar tabs and detachable shoulder straps of the same colour; two-button cuffs; a white double aiguillette *(amfimashálion)* worn on the left shoulder; and a *képi* (replaced with the M1938 helmet when on front-line service). The service dress was completed by cavalry-style breeches, leather leggings over laced ankle boots, and a double-breasted overcoat. Rank insignia for NCOs were of the pre-war diagonal pattern worn on the lower sleeves. Gendarmes were typically armed with a holstered service revolver or pistol on a Sam Browne belt, although rifles, sub-machine guns and other standard infantry equipment were also issued for front-line service.

WEAPONS & PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

By the outbreak of hostilities the Greek Army was equipped with a variety of rifles; most of these dated from World War I, and/or were manufactured in Germany, Austria, Belgium or France. Since by late 1940 the former were allied to Italy, and the latter were occupied by Germany, this rendered the provision of spare parts problematic (the same was not true of ammunition, however, which was mostly produced domestically).

Front-line Greek units were equipped with the reliable Steyr-manufactured 6.5mm Mannlicher-Schönauer M1903 or M1903/14 rifle (of which in excess of 200,000 were in store at the start of hostilities) or the carbine version (of which around 25,000 were available); or with various models of Mauser rifles (some captured from the Ottoman or Bulgarian armies during the Balkan Wars of 1912–13), along with their corresponding (or modified) bayonets. Substantial stocks of Lebel-Berthier M1907/16, Lebel M1886/93 and even old single-shot Gras M1874/80 bolt action rifles and carbines were also in use, especially by support units or in support roles (e.g. as grenade-launching platforms). While somewhat heavy and unwieldy, the Mannlicher-Schönauer rifle would prove superior to its Italian counterparts both in terms of stopping power and in close-combat situations, where its greater length compared to the Italian Mannlicher-Carcano M1891 worked to the advantage of Greek infantrymen.

The range of support weapons in use by the Greek Army in 1940 included Hotchkiss M1909 and M1914 and St Étienne M1907T heavy machine guns, as well as Hotchkiss M1922/26 and Chauchat M1915 LMGs. The Hotchkiss M1922/26 LMG would prove a formidable weapon in the hands of the Greek infantry, as it was more reliable and less prone to overheating than some of its Italian counterparts. Its light weight and relatively low rate of fire also allowed more experienced operators to fire it accurately from the hip, facilitating platoon-level offensive tactics. The Army and the Gendarmerie were also armed with Steyr-Solothurn S1-100 sub-machine guns.

By the outbreak of the war sabres were mostly relegated to ceremonial use (except by cavalry troopers). A service pistol or revolver was the only sidearm carried by officers in the field. Types in use by the Greek Army in 1940 included Browning M1910/22, Steyr M1912 and Ruby M1914 pistols, as well as Colt Army Special M1915, Nagant M1898 and Nagant M1895 revolvers. Older models, as well as other privately-purchased examples, were also in use.

Greek soldiers undergo training in the use of Italian 45mm Brixia M35 infantry light mortars. The Greek Army routinely pressed captured weapons and equipment into service to make up for its many shortages. (© War Museum, Athens)

Equipment

Most Greek foot-soldiers were equipped with the M1938 helmet, painted khaki-green. This was based on the shell of the Italian M33/34 nickel-steel helmet, but without the three peripheral rivet-like ventilation holes of the original (two in the sides and one in the back), and with a locally-produced adjustable leather liner and a chinstrap with a brass buckle. Since the new M1938 helmet was not available in adequate quantities to equip all mobilized troops, others were issued with French-made M1915 Adrian helmets, some of which still sported a frontal badge of a stylized Greek cross on a shield surmounted by the Greek Royal Crown. Some even had British-made Mk I 'Brodie' helmets, supplied by the British around the time of the outbreak of hostilities.

The standard natural-leather belt issued to all personnel featured a rectangular double-prong brass buckle, and was held at the waist with the help of two brass hooks stitched into the tunic's side seams. The belt was supported at front and rear by natural-leather Y-straps. Troops were expected to carry a knapsack (similar in style to the French M1935 pattern), a rolled blanket, a mess tin which was strapped on to the knapsack, and a one-litre water canteen slung from the waist belt. Depending on the type of rifle issued to each unit, ammunition pouches included the Mannlicher twin-pouch, the Mauser triple-pouch, as well as the French M1916 Lebel pouch, worn flanking the belt buckle and (in the case of the Mannlicher) at rear centre. 'Bread-bag' haversacks and entrenching tools were also carried, as were, occasionally, German or British-made gas masks.

***Regio Esercito* officers pose during a training course at the Central Infantry School at Civitavecchia. All members of this group – which includes line Infantry, *Alpini* and *Carabineri Reali* – wear the smart M33 service dress uniform (compare with Plate F2). Note the black velvet facing on the collars, the stiff grey shoulder boards, and the relatively large-size rank stripes above the piped tunic cuffs. (Private collection)**

THE ITALIAN ARMY

Composition and organization

Like most European armies, the Regio Esercito was run down in the aftermath of World War I. However, the rise of Fascism, and the overt territorial ambitions of its advocates, would see Italy's armed forces grow, both as projections of Italy's geostrategic aspirations and as instruments of domestic control and indoctrination.

The Italian Army of 1940 was, on paper, a force to be reckoned with; its mobilized strength that June was recorded as 1,630,000 men under arms. By May 1940, with the second phase of its mobilization completed, the Army was composed of eight field armies, 24 army corps, and 68 divisions, including armoured, motorized cavalry *(Celere)*, and mountain *(Alpini)* formations. However, partly because of Italy's limited industrial capabilities and lack of raw materials, and partly on account of antiquated doctrine deeply inculcated in an officer class steeped in the traditions of World War I, the Army was not a genuinely modern fighting force.

Shortages condemned many of those called up during the second phase of mobilization to the issue of obsolescent weapons and personal equipment. The artillery was among the branches to suffer the most from Italy's industrial limitations, retaining during the Greek–Italian War antiquated types of domestically-produced and foreign guns, including many old Austrian pieces taken as war reparations in 1919. However, although the Italian Army compared poorly with other contemporary forces, and fell considerably short of being able to deliver on Mussolini's imperial ambitions, it was superior to its Greek counterpart especially in terms of motorization and mechanization.

Regiments and divisions

Infantry regiments consisted of three battalions plus one heavy weapons company. In addition to personal weapons the regiment had 6x 81mm mortars (identical to those in use by the Greek Army); 54x 45mm Brixia light mortars (with capabilities similar to those of the Greeks' Lebel-

launched grenades); 24x machine guns; and 108x LMGs, giving them the same firepower as their Greek Army counterparts.

Following the Pariani Reforms of 1939, infantry divisions were 'binary' *(divisione binaria)*, i.e. they were built around two – rather than the more conventional three – infantry regiments. These were (usually) numbered in succession within the division, but not in a logical sequence (e.g. the 1st Inf Div 'Superga' had the 91st and 92nd Inf Regts, and the 2nd Inf Div 'Sforzesca' had the 53rd and 54th). Both regiments in a division were referred to by the same name, which occasionally coincided with that of the division itself. The use of divisional names (rather than numbers) in official reports, and the coincidence between those names and regimental ones, was a constant source of confusion.

The division also had one artillery regiment (24x 75mm, 12x 100mm), plus a pack-gun company (8x 47mm); one mortar battalion (18x 81mm tubes); one AT company (8x 47mm guns); one AA company (8x 20mm guns); one cavalry reconnaissance squadron; and logistical support services. These were, however, 'paper' strengths, and even if achieved in practice they could seldom be rebuilt after campaign losses. The lack of infantry manpower in the binary divisions undermined their efficiency, especially in the attack. However, the firepower of Italian divisions exceeded that of their Greek counterparts: the former could theoretically deliver no less than 4,160 tons of ordnance within one minute (of which 3,520kg were mortar bombs), while the capacity of the latter did not exceed 2,940 tons (of which 1,720kg of mortar bombs). The Greek artillery would nevertheless distinguish itself during the conflict by the accuracy and concentration of its fire.

Italian infantry divisions tended to be recruited from distinct regions; this was reflected in their names, which corresponded to those of Italian cities (e.g. 19th Div 'Venezia'), or geographical regions, perhaps combined with a nickname (e.g. 7th Div 'Lupi di Toscana', 'Wolves of Tuscany'). The elite Alpine mountain divisions (whose table of organization and armament differed somewhat from that of regular divisions, to reflect their specific mission) were invariably recruited from mountainous localities in the north of Italy such as the Abruzzi or the Trento. Three of these divisions ('Julia', 'Pusteria', and 'Tridentina') were committed to the Greek–Italian theatre.

From April 1940, a Fascist Militia 'legion' composed of two or, occasionally, three 670-strong 'cohorts' or battalions of *Camicie Nere* ('Black Shirts') was often attached to regular Army infantry divisions, bringing their strength up to that of a conventional three-regiment formation (14,300 all ranks). Legions were generally perceived as semi-independent units, mostly intended for use as shock *(assalto)* troops. Their attachment to regular Army divisions was generally resented by the Regio Esercito: it led to an inefficient duplication of command structures (the administration of Black Shirt units came under the remit of MVSN Headquarters, not the Ministry of War). However, the

These three lieutenants photographed at Lailiza, Albania in January 1941 have a much more workaday appearance than the bathed and polished students at Civitavecchia. The left-hand *Alpino* wears the all-grey M40 tunic, his comrade on the right the black-collared M33. The officer in the centre has the rectangular collar patches of either the Infantry or the *Carabinieri*. (Private collection)

incorporation of Black Shirt units into Army formations was not completed until well after the Greek–Italian War. Despite their enthusiasm for the Fascist cause, the efficiency of Black Shirt units was lower than that of the regulars, and their overall contribution to Italy's war effort was patchy.

Italian cavalry divisions were partially motorized and mechanized, hence their designation as *Celere* ('Rapid' or 'Mobile'). With an establishment of 7,750 all ranks, they were composed of two to four cavalry regiments (of which one, 'Guide', was committed to the Greek–Italian theatre), each of four squadrons plus an MG squadron; a three-battalion lorry-borne regiment of *Bersaglieri* or *Granatieri* elite infantry; an artillery regiment (24 guns); a 'light tank' group (51 to 64x L3/33 tankettes); a partly mechanized reconnaissance squadron including an armoured car company; a motorcycle company; and an AT platoon.

Mechanized divisions, of which one ('Centauro') was also committed to the Greek–Italian theatre, were composed of a tank regiment with three battalions (in theory, totalling 163 medium tanks); a lorry-borne Bersaglieri regiment; an artillery regiment; and a mechanized reconnaissance squadron.

A seldom-seen silhouette: for his studio portrait this pre-war Italian infantryman poses in a peaked service cap rather than the ubiquitous *bustina* forage cap, and wearing white gloves. The *mostrine* collar tabs in divisional colours and pattern are set on the black-faced collar of the M33 uniform; the white braid edging all round the collar indicates an officer cadet. (Private Collection)

Italian Army Order of Battle, Greek–Albanian border, 27 October 1940

Western Macedonia sector:
Northern (XXVI) Army Corps (Gen Nassi):
53rd 'Arezzo' and 19th 'Venezia' Inf Divs (north of Korçë, facing Yugoslavia); 49th 'Parma' and 29th 'Piemonte' Inf Divs (south of Korçë, facing Greece), of which the latter served as Army Reserve.
Central (Pindus) sector:
3rd 'Julia' Alp Div (plus subsequently 67th 'Bari' Inf Div, after its planned landing on Corfu was cancelled).
Southern (Epirus) sector:
Southern (XXV) 'Ciamuria' Army Corps (Gen Rossi):
23rd 'Ferrara' and 51st 'Sienna' Inf Divs, 131st 'Centauro' Mech Div, Cav Regt 'Guide'.
'Coastal Group':
3rd 'Granatieri di Sardegna' Inf Regt, Cav Regts 'Milano' and 'Aosta', plus one mountain artillery battery.

Character: conscripts, and the officer corps

Like the Greek Army, the Regio Esercito was raised by conscription, and all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 54 were liable for military service. In peacetime this was divided into three stages: pre-military training (between 18 and the completion of the trainee's 20th year), conscript service (lasting 18 months from the conscript's 21st birthday), and post-military training (from the completion of the conscript's service until his 33rd birthday), followed by transfer to active reserve status (between his 33rd and 54th birthday). During World War II youths were conscripted for active service at the age of 18 without undergoing pre-military training. The level of training for conscripts *(truppa)* was adequate, at least during the early period of the war, and some soldiers had gained combat experience in Abyssinia or Spain. That said, their

overall efficiency fell short of the standard of other contemporary armies, mainly because of poor leadership and shortages of matériel.

All career NCOs *(sotto-ufficiali)* of the rank of sergeant and above were volunteer, long-service, professional soldiers, who were carefully selected, trained and promoted under a combined selective and seniority system. There were five regular grades of senior NCOs: sergeant *(sergente)*, sergeant-major *(sergente maggiore)*, ordinary marshal *(maresciallo ordinario)*, chief marshal *(maresciallo capo)*, and marshal-major *(maresciallo maggiore)*. The most senior rank of *aiuttante di battaglia* was reintroduced in November 1940 to reward conspicuous bravery by men whose education was insufficient for promotion to officer rank. All junior NCO ranks *(soldato scelto, caporale* and *caporale maggiore*) were filled by short-service conscripts. Their military education was not comparable to that of career NCOs, and their overall standard was low. The shortage of competent, well-trained, and experienced NCOs was among the Regio Esercito's major weaknesses during World War II.

The ranks of commissioned officers *(ufficiali)* fell into three categories: general officers *(ufficiali generali)*, field officers *(ufficiali superiori)*, and company officers *(ufficiali inferiori)*. Above the rank of full general there were also two grades of *marescialli:* Marshals of the Empire *(Marescialli del'Impero)*, a rank only held by the King of Italy and Mussolini (who was the de facto commander-in-chief as well as being Minister of Military Affairs), and Marshals of Italy *(Marescialli d'Italia)*, of which there were six during World War II. Officers were promoted on the basis of seniority up to the rank of colonel, and thereafter by selection according to merit. However, personal connections and proximity to the Fascist Party had a significant impact on an officer's career prospects, to the detriment of efficiency and morale.

Youths of a higher standard of education would perform their conscript service as reserve officers, providing the Army's main pool of junior officers in wartime. They were expected to spend seven months of their conscript service as cadets, attending a specialized training course, and the remainder as officers in regular Army units. Conscripts who successfully completed their course in a Corps Area Cadet School could be commissioned as second lieutenants of the Reserve without having attended the Military Academy at Modena. While their progressive promotions were predetermined by seniority in the Army list, their actual appointments were largely a function of their social class and connections, meaning that reserve officers were often poorly trained or otherwise unfit to exercise command.

Although blemished by a crease to the original print, this studio portrait of a young *Alpino* shows the M33 uniform clearly; it is remarkable for the exaggeratedly bouffant cut of his *pantaloni*. His Tyrolean felt hat, on the table, bears the black embroidered *fregio* arm-of-service badge, featuring an eagle above a bugle-horn set against crossed rifles. (Private collection)

UNIFORMS & INSIGNIA

The Italians tolerated a good deal of latitude in the observance of uniform and insignia regulations, resulting in a variety of individual

An Italian Army field officer in M33 uniform, the pale *cordellino* cap and tunic contrasting with the greener shade of the breeches. Under magnification, the embroidered gold-thread *fregio* on his *bustina* cap is that of the Bridging Engineers. He does not seem to display the Engineers' single black 'flame' piped in red on the collar, but only a large gold national star set on the red-piped black collar itself. The yellow braid rank insignia above his cuff – a 'curl', and two shallow stripes above one deep – mark him as a lieutenant-colonel. His *grigioverde* breeches, with double black side-stripes separated by a red seam-piping, are confined by rigid leather gaiters above spurred ankle boots. (Private collection)

appearance particularly among junior officers. In June 1940 regulations were issued prescribing the use by all ranks, including officers, of the same style of field uniforms, but retention of older-pattern items was a frequent phenomenon (particularly of the M33 tunic among officers).

The Italian ranker's service uniform originated in the reforms introduced in 1933–34 by Gen Baistrocchi, replacing in part the M1909-pattern uniform.[4] The new M33 was made of wool (or a mix of wool and synthetic fibre), and produced in varying shades of grey-green *(grigioverde)*. The uniform was to undergo a series of minor modifications culminating in the M40 pattern, to which the following notes refer.

The soldier's single-breasted tunic *(giubba)*, which was similar in cut to that worn by *Arditi* and *Bersaglieri* troops in World War I, had an open collar and lapels and was fastened by three large *grigioverde* buttons, originally of wood and subsequently plastic (see Plate E3). From 1940 the collar, which had previously been in either black or an arm-of-service colour, was plain *grigioverde*. The tunic had two pleated patch breast pockets and two larger pleated skirt pockets, all with scalloped flaps closed by a small button. The plain grey-green shoulder straps were no longer detachable, as in earlier versions. The tunic featured an integral waist belt of the same fabric, adjustable at the front by two small buttons.

It was worn over the grey M39 pullover-type shirt *(camicia)*, in wool for winter or flannel for summer. This had two pleated patch breast pockets with scalloped flaps, and was worn with a grey-green necktie – except in the Fascist Militia, whose shirts and ties were black.

The grey-green 'semi-breeches' *(pantaloni)* reaching to below the knee had two slash front pockets, and one in the rear closed by a button. The pantaloons were high-waisted and baggy in the thigh, and were confined by puttees (*mollettiere* or *fasce gambiere*). Specialist units (including Cavalry, Artillery, Motor Transport and Tank troops) instead wore leather gaiters *(gambali)* or high woollen socks. The laced, hobnailed ankle boots *(scarpone chiodatte)* were of M1912 pattern, either natural brown or blackened.

The M40 overcoat, of the same fabric as the uniform, came in two versions, mounted and dismounted. They were distinguishable mainly by the size of the collar and the cut of the skirts: the former had a large, rounded collar, with the skirts flaring from the waist, while the latter had a smaller, angular collar and straight skirts. Both were single-breasted,

4 For a more comprehensive account see MAA 340, *The Italian Army 1940–45 (1): Europe 1940–43*. For the M1909 uniforms see MAA 387, *The Italian Army in World War I*.

(continued on page 33)

COMMANDERS
1: Maj Gen Vassileios Vrahnos
2: Gen Alexandros Papagos
3: Gen Ugo Cavallero

HELLENIC LAND ARMY

1: Private, 51st Inf Regt, I Division; Epirus front, Nov 1940
2: Private, 3/40 Evzones Regt; Mali i Xhorët, Dec 1940
3: Corporal, IV Inf Bde; Mt Morava, Nov 1940

HELLENIC LAND ARMY
1: Private, 9th Inf Regt; Albania, Dec 1940
2: Private, 1st Co, 1st Ski Bn; Mt Kamia, Jan 1941
3: Nurse, Hellenic Red Cross; Himarë, Albania, Jan 1941

HELLENIC LAND FORCES

1: Second lieutenant, Infantry; Athens, Oct 1940
2: Lieutenant, 1st Cavalry Regt, Cav Div; Konitsa, Feb 1941
3: Sergeant, Royal Gendarmerie; Korçë, Dec 1940

ITALIAN ROYAL ARMY

1: Private, I Bn, 1st Regt, 3rd Alpine Div 'Julia'; Samarina, Oct 1940
2: Tank crewman, 31st Tank Regt, 131st Armd Div 'Centauro'; Këlcyrë, Jan 1941
3: Corporal, II Bn, 47th Inf Regt, 23rd Inf Div 'Ferrara'; Vigla Hill, Epirus, Nov 1940

OFFICERS, ITALIAN ROYAL ARMY

1: Major, I Bn, 2nd Alpine Artillery Regt, 2nd Alpine Div 'Tridentina'; Jan 1941
2: Captain of Infantry, parade uniform; Oct 1940
3: Captain, II Bn, 3rd Regt, 5th Alpine Div 'Pusteria'; Nov 1940

NAVAL FORCES

1: Petty Officer 1st Class, Hellenic Royal Navy, Dec 1940
2: Leading Seaman, HHMS *Georghios Averoff,* Oct 1940
3: First lieutenant, Italian Royal Navy, gala uniform; Oct 1940

AIR FORCES

1: Flt Lt Marinos Mitralexis, HRAF 22nd Fighter Sqn; Thessaloniki/Sedes, Nov 1940
2: Pilot Officer, HRAF 32nd Bomber Sqn; Trikkala, Dec 1940
3: Lieutenant pilot, Italian Royal Air Force; Brindisi, Nov 1940

with plain shoulder straps; two large horizontal, straight-flapped slash hip pockets; and two small vertical 'hand-warmer' flapless slash breast pockets closed by a small button. The straight turn-back cuffs, secured by a small button on the rear seam, could be turned down over the hands for protection. The cape *(mantellina),* which had proved to be an insufficient substitute for the overcoat during World War I, was still in use at the time of the Greek–Italian War, mostly by Alpine units.

The practical and popular M35-pattern undress cap *(bustina)* was of an envelope-like design, with a folding front peak (visor) and ear-flaps. When folded down for protection against the cold, the latter buttoned under the chin. When not in use the flaps were folded and buttoned over the top of the cap; the peak stood vertically at the front, displaying on its underside the embroidered arm-of-service badge and unit number.

Officers' *grigioverde* uniforms were privately tailored from finer quality *cordellino* material, often visibly – sometimes, strikingly – paler and greyer in shade. Their tunic *(giacca)* was fasted with four rather than three buttons and had turn-back cuffs. Officers wore riding breeches *(pantaloni alla cavallerizza),* with riding boots *(stivali),* or ankle boots combined with leather gaiters, long socks or, rarely, puttees.

An MVSN militiaman with a camera slung above his belt smiles for a fellow photographer in the spring sunshine of Albania, shortly after the end of the conflict. Pushed so far back as to be hardly visible is a tasselled black cap; often loosely called a 'fez', this in fact more closely resembled the soft Algerian *chechia* of the French Zouaves. He wears the black shirt that gave Fascist Party members their nickname, with Army grey-green trousers and puttees. Note the MVSN dagger worn at his left hip beside the belt pouches. (Private collection)

Insignia of rank and arm of service

(See also illustrated charts in MAA 340, pages 41–42.)

Warrant officers – marshals and battalion adjutants – were distinguished by golden-yellow shoulder-strap edging and a sequence of black silk lengthways stripes. Senior NCO rank was worn on the upper sleeves in the form of deep and/or shallow downwards-pointing chevrons, those worn in 1940 being smaller than earlier versions; sergeant and sergeant-major displayed them in golden-yellow, junior NCOs in red. (The MVSN had their own rank titles and insignia – see MAA 340, page 42.) Qualification badges (machine-gunner, driver, etc.) were worn on the left sleeve below the rank insignia. The ribbons of decorations and service medals were worn above the left breast pocket, while specialty badges and other pin-on insignia and awards might be worn on either pocket.

Tunic collar patches *(mostrine)* identified the formation or unit of assignment or the arm of service of all ranks by a wide variety of combined colours and shapes. They were in the form of rectangles (Infantry, and *Carabinieri Reali*), or single, two or three-pointed 'flames'. Single-pointed flames were worn by Artillery, Engineers, various services, the Frontier Guard, etc.; two-pointed flames by the Alpini, Bersaglieri, Tank and Motor Transport units, and three-pointed flames only by Cavalry units. All these collar patches bore at their lower end a white metal or, less frequently, wire-embroidered five-point star of the Royal House of Savoy. MVSN personnel displayed instead the Party symbol of a white-metal *fascia* on a two-pointed black flame. Overcoat collars did not display *mostrine,* but only larger-sized versions of the Savoy star.

Officers' collar stars were gilt rather than white metal. Officers' rank was displayed on the lower sleeves of both the tunic and the overcoat, in the form of shallow and deep braid stripes (*galloncini* and *galloni* respectively) topped by a curl *(occhiello)*. From 1940 these were shorter (i.e., narrower on the sleeve) than previously. Those of general officers were in white artificial silk, and were complemented by an ornamental band of pseudo-classical pattern *(greca)* immediately below them; the King of Italy and Mussolini wore a double *greca*. Officers below general rank had yellow artificial silk insignia (see Plates A3, F1 and F3); when in shirtsleeve order, rank insignia might be worn on a tab above the left pocket. Rank was also displayed on the officers' *bustina*, in a sequence of gilt stars, bars, and 'boxed' stars. It took a different form on the Alpini hat, as shallow and deep upwards-pointing braid chevrons on the left side of the crown; the hat feather *(nappina)* was black for all ranks below major, and white for majors and above.

Snapshot of an Italian Army sapper on guard duty, in M33 uniform. He is equipped with the 6.5mm M1891 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, knife bayonet, and grey-green leather belt equipment that would remain standard issue until Italy's capitulation to the Allies in September 1943. (Private collection)

WEAPONS & PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

The Italian Army's logistic effort was bedevilled by a profusion of small arms ammunition calibres. The main infantry weapon was the Mannlicher-Carcano M1891 bolt-action rifle, in 6.5mm or 7.35mm calibres – the latter representing a half-hearted and ultimately discontinued reaction to the perceived inefficiency of 6.5mm calibre weapons. A carbine version, the M91/38, was a shorter weapon with an integral folding bayonet. A slightly modernized version of the M1891 rifle – the M91/41, in 6.5mm calibre – was also in use. Sub-machine guns used during the conflict included the 9mm Beretta M1918, the Beretta M38 in 9mm Parabellum, and the 9mm OVP Glisenti. The Italians never standardized on a satisfactory machine gun, and models in use included the Fiat-Revelli M1914 in 6.5mm, Fiat-Revelli M1935 in 8mm, the 8mm Breda 37 heavy MG, and the Breda 30 LMG in 6.5mm. The infantry battalion had two platoons each with 9x Brixia M1935 45mm light mortars. The regiment had a company with 6x 81mm Mortaio da 81/14 M1935 (essentially identical to the Greek Army's medium mortars, but reportedly firing sub-standard ammunition).

The officers' main sidearms in use were the venerable Bodeo M1889 10.35mm revolver, the obsolete Glisenti M1910 9mm semi-automatic pistol, and the up-to-date Beretta M1934 .380 ACP (9mm short) pistol.

Personal equipment

The articles typically listed for issue to conscripts included a steel helmet, knapsack, belt and suspender, double ammunition pouches *(giberne)*, canteen, oval aluminium mess kit,

An Italian soldier, in pre-1935 uniform and displaying a painted metal divisional shield badge on his left upper sleeve, takes aim at an imaginary target with a 6.5mm Breda M30 light machine gun. Badly designed and poorly manufactured, this over-complex LMG was prone to overheating, feed problems and jamming, but remained Italy's standard-issue squad light automatic weapon throughout the war. (Private collection)

M1891 bayonet frog and entrenching tool, M29 camouflaged shelter-quarter *(tenda telo mimetico),* a T35 Pirelli gas mask in its oblong canvas pouch, two reserve rations, and a minimum of clothing.

The regular Army helmet was the nickel-steel M33/34 varnished in dull grey-green, and bearing in black stencil form a stylized arm-of-service badge and unit number. French Adrian helmets of World War I vintage were also in use. The belt, suspender and double ammunition pouches were of M1891 pattern, made of leather dyed grey-green. The single suspender strap looped around the wearer's neck, with both ends secured behind the ammunition pouches (a less efficient design than the classic Y-straps used by other armies); the pouches were worn centrally, with the brass belt buckle offset to the wearer's left. The M39 knapsack of waterproof canvas was internally divided into compartments. Externally, it had two pockets for cartridges, and rings on both sides to which two additional pockets for grenades could be attached. It featured leather stowage straps for the rolled overcoat, blanket, and/or the camouflaged tent-cloth shelter-quarter (which doubled as a poncho) and its accompanying steel tent poles.

AIR & NAVAL FORCES

The Air Forces

In 1930 the previously separate Army and Navy air branches were unified as Greece's third armed service, the **Hellenic Royal Air Force,** and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos was the first Air Minister. Until 1935 the

state of the HRAF mirrored that of the Land Army. At the time of the failed coup of 1 March 1935 the service had no operational fighter aircraft, and five Avia BH-33Es had to be hurriedly purchased from Yugoslavia to help suppress it. The bulk of the pre-war fleet consisted of around 30 venerable Breguet 19 A2/B2, 17x Potez 25 TOE, 25x Morane-Saulnier MS 230 and 12x Fairey IIIF, alongside a number of Avro 621 and 626 trainers.

In 1936 Greece placed orders for 48 fighters – 36x Polish PZL P.24 F/G , and 12x French Bloch MB 151 (only nine of the latter being delivered) – and 48 bombers (12x British Bristol Blenheim Mk I, 12x Fairey Battle Mk I, and 24x French Potez 633 (only 11 of the latter being delivered). Naval cooperation and reconnaissance aircraft were also purchased – 12x British Avro Anson Mk I, and from Germany 12x Dornier Do 22 and 16x Henschel Hs126A-1 – alongside a number of more modern trainers. As a result, by 28 October 1940 the HRAF fielded some 140 serviceable aircraft, including 45 fighters and 74 bombers and reconnaissance types.

The HRAF numbered some 250 officers and 3,000 enlisted men under the Commander-in-Chief of Air Forces, Air Commodore Tilios. It was organized in two flying regiments each of three squadrons, scattered across a number of fairly rudimentary airfields including at Dhekeleia, Pháleron and Elefsìs (Athens), Candia, Dráma, Giànnina (Ioannina), Paramythià, Lárissa, Trikkala, Volos, Sedes (Thessaloniki), and Tanágra (Thebes). The PZLs equipped 21st–23rd Squadrons (early in December 1940 21st Sqn re-equipped with 14x Gladiators handed over by the RAF);

Pilots of the HRAF's 22nd Squadron drawn up in front of their Polish-built PZL P.24 high-wing monoplane fighters at their base at Sedes (Thessaloniki). Here they wear summer flying helmets and light khaki canvas flying suits; in winter they had sheepskin overalls, plus warmer gloves, and fur-lined flying helmets and boots – see Plate H2. (© War Museum, Athens)

the MB 151s were stationed at Athens alongside the Potez bombers of 31st Sqn, while 32nd and 33rd Sqns operated the Blenheims and Fairey Battles respectively.

Despite its lack of modern aircraft the HRAF acquitted itself honourably during the Greek–Italian War. Its aircrews, many of them trained in Britain or France, fought with great spirit, while the ground crews were able to maintain the availability of the machines despite supply difficulties and a severe lack of spare parts. The HRAF's 68 aerial and ground victories during the Greek–Italian War (for a loss of 31 machines and 51 airmen) represent an impressive performance, testifying to stubborn and courageous resistance to the Italian invaders.

Studio portrait of a *Regia Aeronautica* pilot in blue-grey winter service dress (see Plate H3), with gold Savoy stars woven directly on the collar points. His rank of *tenente colonello* is indicated by the gold cap-band stripes (two shallow above one deep), and his status as a field officer of the flying branch by the shoulder 'boxes' with double gold frames enclosing a sceptre emblem. Above his medal ribbons note the gilt metal *aquila da pilota* crowned eagle badge of a qualified pilot. (Private collection)

At the outbreak of hostilities, Italy's **Regia Aeronautica** was one of the most modern air forces in the world. Its crews were well trained, and some had had substantial combat experience in Abyssinia and Spain. The air assets committed to the campaign against Greece greatly outnumbered those of the defenders. Some 400 aircraft (including 107 fighters and 55 bombers) were already stationed in Albania by the start of the invasion, and more were diverted there during the conflict; another 54 fighters, 119 bombers and 20 Stukas were also based at Brindisi across the Strait of Otranto. Italian airmen had the advantage of operating out of five relatively modern airfields located close to the front. The total strength committed amounted to some 160 fighters (the majority Fiat CR42s, but including G50 and Macchi MC200 monoplanes), and 135 bombers (mostly SM81s and SM79s), plus the 20 Junkers Ju87s. However, the effectiveness of the Regia Aeronautica's contribution was reduced not only by the difficult weather that hampered both sides, but also by inadequate staff work. The command in Albania had poor communication links with Brindisi, and lack of local cooperation with the Army led to failures to coordinate air and ground operations effectively. By the end of February 1941 the combined efforts of the HRAF and RAF had significantly hampered Italian efforts over Albania.

Introductions to the uniforms of the two air forces can be found in Plate H and the corresponding commentaries.

The Naval Forces

The interwar years found the **Hellenic Royal Navy** in a similar predicament to that faced by the other armed services. A long-overdue modernization programme launched in the late 1930s provided for the acquisition of four new destroyers and six torpedo boats, but of these only two destroyers (HHMS *Vassileas Georghios* and *Vassilissa Olga*) had been commissioned by the outbreak of hostilities. On 28 October 1940 the HRN's fleet consisted of two pre-1914 battleships (armoured cruisers); two old light cruisers; four old destroyers; four Italian-built Hydra Class destroyers; 13 obsolete torpedo boats and two motor torpedo boats; and six French-built mid-1920s vintage Katsonis Class submarines. The HRN numbered 6,300 regular officers and men plus 11,000 reservists, under the command of the Chief of Naval Staff, Adml Sakellariou.

HRN officers in winter service dress of a dark blue peaked cap and double-breasted reefer jacket with gold insignia, almost indistinguishable from that of Britain's Royal Navy. (© War Museum, Athens)

The HRN's tasks were to ensure the safe passage of Army reservists called to the colours from across the scattered Greek archipelago; to patrol the Albanian coast; and to provide naval gunfire support to the Army. HRN submarines harassed enemy shipping, scoring a number of morale-boosting successes (see Chronology). The German Luftwaffe attacks which accompanied the invasion of Greece in April 1941 led to the loss of no fewer than 29 of the HRN's warships and support vessels. From 21 April the HRN's surviving vessels, including its flagship (the venerable Italian-built Pisa Class armoured cruiser HHMS *Georghios Averoff*) would make good their escape to Egypt, where they joined Britain's Mediterranean Fleet.

At the outbreak of the Greek–Italian War the Italian **Regia Marina** was among the most modern and powerful blue-water navies in the world. Its fleet consisted of six battleships; seven heavy and 12 light cruisers; 59

Italian ratings march past in their winter 'square rig' service dress. The pre-war tally-ribbon of the *basco* cap bore yellow-embroidered lettering ' RN ' (for *Regia Nave,* 'Royal Ship') followed by the name of their vessel, all between two stars, or in wartime simply ' * REGIA MARINA * ' . The Savoy star appeared in the corners of the white-edged blue sailor's collar worn over the jumper. (Private collection)

destroyers; 68 motor torpedo boats, and no fewer than 115 submarines. Its main tasks during the Greek–Italian War were to escort transport vessels across the Strait of Otranto, and to patrol the coast of Albania for Greek incursions. The Regia Marina also launched occasional attacks on Greek positions (as on 18 December 1940, when Italian warships bombarded Greek targets in the north of Corfu). The Italian Navy also harassed the RN's Mediterranean Fleet (as on 26 March 1941, when six Italian motor torpedo boats attacked and seriously damaged the heavy cruiser HMS *York* in Suda Bay, Crete). The contribution of the Regia Marina to Italy's war effort in Albania was relatively limited, however, not least because of the priority demands placed on it by Italy's shocking defeats at the hands of British Empire forces in North Africa in winter 1940–41.

For an introduction to the naval uniforms worn during the conflict, see Plate G and the corresponding commentaries.

ALLIES & AUXILIARIES

British and Empire forces

On 13 April 1939, Britain publicly guaranteed Greece's independence. Acting on that declaration, Britain would send, on 3 November 1940, eight Bristol Blenheim I light bombers (RAF No.30 Squadron) and a handful of Gloster Gladiator biplane fighters (80 Sqn), under the command of Air Cdre John d'Albiac, to support Greece's defence. On 6 November, Sgt Merrifield of 30 Sqn would become the first RAF serviceman to die for Greece in World War II. The initial RAF contingent would be reinforced, with Blenheim Is and IVs of Nos. 11, 84, 113 and 211 Sqns plus 6 Vickers Wellingtons from No. 70, and Gladiators of Nos. 33 and 112 Squadrons. In February 1941 the first Hawker Hurricane I fighters began to replace 80 Sqn's Gladiators; by the end of that month, when No. 208 Sqn joined them, 16 Hurricanes were already flying with Nos. 80 and 33 Squadrons. In the prevailing conditions keeping them in the air was extremely difficult, and the German invasion found only about 80 RAF aircraft serviceable out of some 200 in country. By that time they had claimed 93 'kills' confirmed and 26 probables, for ten aircraft and four airmen lost. By the end of 1940 one Gladiator pilot alone, the South African-born Flt Lt 'Pat' Pattle of No. 80 Sqn, had already recorded at least 24 aerial victories over Greece. The RAF would lose a total of 150 aircrew and 13 others; just seven Hurricanes would escape to Crete on 25 April 1941, and total aircraft losses would be 72 in the air and 55 on the ground, plus 82 abandoned unserviceable.

On 22 February 1941 it was agreed that a total of 100,000 British and Empire troops

RAF NCOs and men photographed in front of the Grand Hotel in Athens. Although the RAF's final struggle against the Luftwaffe would be an unequal contest, their many successes against the Italians should be remembered. For example, by the time he was killed flying a Hurricane over Piraeus on 20 April 1941 as CO of No.33 Sqn, Sqn Ldr M.T. St J. Pattle had achieved an estimated though unconfirmed total of up to 41 aerial 'kills', compared with the eventual 38 confirmed that made Wing Cdr J.E. Johnson the RAF's acknowledged leading fighter 'ace' of the war. (© War Museum, Athens)

In an obviously posed propaganda photo, 'Diggers' in the distinctive Australian service dress are shown fraternizing on the Acropolis with Greek Royal Guardsmen wearing the traditional costume that inspired Evzone uniform. The grey-backed rectangular colour patch displayed on the upper sleeve identifies a unit of the 2nd AIF's 6th Australian Division.

This formation suffered some 800 combat casualties, but carried out an orderly withdrawal from the mainland; in the desperate fighting in Crete during May 1941 the division would lose nearly 1,600 killed and wounded plus 5,000 captured. (© War Museum, Athens)

would be sent to Greece, mainly from North Africa. Earlier, Prime Minister Metaxas had rejected Churchill's offer to dispatch troops so as to avoid giving Germany a pretext to come to its Axis partner's aid in Albania. The first troops disembarked at Piraeus on 7 March 1941, less than a week after the entry of German units into Bulgaria. By 24 April some 62,000 British and Empire troops had arrived, forming British Expeditionary Force 'W' (so designated after its commander, Gen Sir Henry Maitland Wilson). They included British 1st Armd Bde, 6th Australian Div, 2nd New Zealand Div, as well as several pioneer battalions of Palestinian Jews and Arabs, together with Cypriots. These troops, only half of whom had combat roles, were stationed to the south of the Aliakmon River in north-eastern Greece, alongside the Olympus-Vermion line; this rear deployment was so that Greece could avoid providing Germany with an excuse to invade. 'W Force' did not take part in operations against the Regio Esercito, but was centrally engaged after the German invasion (see Chronology).

Cypriot volunteers

The outbreak of the Greek–Italian War caused ripples in Cyprus, which was then a British Crown colony. Greek Cypriots identified with Greece's struggles, and many Cypriots had taken part in the Balkan Wars as volunteers. Under the auspices of the Church of Cyprus, several thousand young Cypriots now expressed their wish to enlist in the Greek Army, a movement that the British authorities opposed and repressed (with

Greek government agreement). This did not prevent an undetermined number of Cypriots from travelling to Greece, mostly via Egypt, to volunteer for the Greek Army. An estimated 40 Cypriot university students pursuing studies in Greece at the outbreak of the conflict are also known to have enlisted and seen active service during the Greek–Italian War. Finally, in March and April 1941 an estimated 5,000 members of the British Army's Cyprus Regt, consisting of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, would be sent to Greece, where they would serve mainly as pioneers (as would several mixed Jewish and Arab battalions raised in British Mandate Palestine). Cypriot volunteers serving with the Greek Army displayed no special insignia.

Albanian auxiliary forces

Given the vaunted state of 'personal union' between Italy and Albania following the latter's annexation in April 1939, Albania found itself in a state of war against Greece in October 1940. While the average Albanian was not entirely adverse to Italy's military adventure, and despite the fact that some Albanian troops were incorporated in the Regio Esercito, the extent of their actual contribution to the Italian war effort is debatable.

The Italian High Command had endorsed the attachment of two Albanian light infantry battalions to each Italian infantry division for the operations against Greece. However, of the ten battalions initially planned, only half had been raised by the outbreak of hostilities; those recorded were the 'Gramos', 'Drinos', 'Pescosolido', 'Chiaravalle' and 'Timur' battalions. Some of these were committed to combat, and several seem to have been exclusively composed of Albanian personnel of all ranks, armed and equipped like their Italian counterparts. Additionally, there is evidence that at least one Albanian MVSN Legion of three battalions was raised for use in the conflict, and the same appears to be true of a handful of artillery units (e.g. the 'Dhaiti' Mountain Battery). The attachment of Albanian irregular forces to Italian Army units to serve as guides, interpreters or sabotage teams is also documented.

The war record of Albanian units was mixed. Some (especially those incorporating former Royal Albanian Army elements) seem to have acquitted themselves well, while others did not. Some units were dissolved during the first two months of the conflict, due to either casualties or desertions, but others were still attached to the Italian Army at the time of the *Primavera* offensive. Some on the Italian side, including Mussolini and Marshal Badoglio, would seek to blame the Italian Army's failure on the Albanians' poor performance and untrustworthiness, but this was an unwarranted shifting of blame given the limited number of Albanian combatants. While Albanian units were, by and large, dressed and equipped like the Italian troops, contemporary photographs show the use of the white felt fez national headdress, and double-headed eagle badges on the upper sleeve.

CONCLUSION

The Greek–Italian War exacted a heavy human cost. According to official Greek sources, Greek casualties stood at just under 60,000 men, including 13,676 dead or missing presumed killed, and 42,485 wounded (this

Portrait of Mordechai Frizis in the pre-war uniform of an infantry captain while attending France's *École Militaire Supérieure.* Born in Chalkis, Evia, to a Romaniote Jewish family, Frizis volunteered for the Greek Army and fought with distinction in World War I, the Ukraine, and the Greek–Turkish War of 1919–22. Earning the devotion of his men and the respect of his superiors for his integrity, intellect, professionalism and humanity, Col Frizis played a leading role in the VIII Div's defence of Kalamas during 2–8 November 1940 as commander of the 'Aoos Detachment'. He was killed in action on 5 December near Permet, Albania, during the Greek counter-attack. (© Collection of Jewish Museum of Greece)

including around 25,000 suffering from frostbite). An unconfirmed but significant number of civilians also perished, due to the Regia Aeronautica's strategically questionable bombing raids against towns. Official Italian sources give an estimate of 90,000 casualties, including 13,755 dead, 25,067 missing presumed killed, and 50,784 wounded (including 12,368 frostbite casualties).

The conflict was to have several other mostly unintended but no less significant consequences. Italy's military fiasco was to severely undermine the Italian public's trust in its political and military leadership. Although the Italian Army was to endure many more and worse hardships and losses between April 1941 and Italy's unilateral capitulation in September 1943, its morale was profoundly shaken by the six long months of bitter fighting in the mountains of Pindus and Albania. Another lasting victim of the conflict was the fighting reputation of the Italian soldier; the consequent underestimation of Italian military prowess did little justice to the endurance and sacrifices of the average Italian conscript. He fought bravely under the most gruelling conditions, betrayed by the shortcomings of his command, the deficiencies of his political leadership, poor intelligence, and the obvious gap between Italy's territorial ambitions and the resources necessary to realize them.

The long-term consequences of the conflict were no less pronounced for Greece. Greece's wartime record placed it firmly on the 'right side of history', smoothing its post-war pathway into NATO (and even, long afterwards, into the European Community). It was largely due to the courage of its people and leadership during the Greek–Italian War that Greece did not share the same grim post-war fate as its Balkan neighbours. On the negative side, World War II was to leave an indelible mark on modern Greece, both politically and economically. Left-wing political radicalism, all but uprooted by the repressive Metaxas regime before the Greek–Italian War, was to rear its head from the ashes of that conflict, hijacking the National Resistance movement during the occupation in preparation for a post-war settling of scores with Greece's conservative elements.

Political divisions were to become firmly entrenched by a five-year Civil War bitterly fought during 1944–49 between the Royalists, backed by Britain and the United States, and a predominantly Communist-leaning and Soviet-supported guerrilla movement. This struggle destroyed what was left of the country following the ravages of World War II. Many of contemporary Greece's deep-seated political divisions trace their roots to that war, into which Greece was drawn unnecessarily, but whose memory is still vivid in the Greek collective consciousness. By contrast, Greece's conduct in 1940–41 is still seen as a proud symbol of resistance to foreign aggression, and as an emphatic affirmation of national sovereignty in one of Europe's darkest hours.

PLATE COMMENTARIES

A: COMMANDERS

A1: *Antistràtigos* (Major-General) Vassileios Vrahnos

General Vrahnos, commanding Greece's I Infantry Division, is illustrated as he would have appeared early in the campaign during the battle of Pindus. A veteran of the Balkan Wars, World War I and the Greek–Turkish War (Asia Minor Campaign 1919–22), he is portrayed wearing the general officers' service cap with a double row of gold foliate embroidery edging the lacquered brown peak, and a regulation double-breasted general officers' overcoat. Note the button and gold oak leaf badge on the bright red collar tabs, the exposed scarlet lapel-lining, and the pointed cuffs. The shoulder-strap rank insignia are a gilt metal Royal Cypher above a crossed Mameluke sword and baton and an embroidered silver star. This uniform, and Gen Vranhos's mountain walking staff, are preserved in the Thessaloniki War Museum.

Three Greek Army officers of a support or service branch (perhaps the Medical Corps) – their buttoned collar tabs bear an emblem unlike the grenade worn by the combat arms. The second lieutenant (left) and captain (centre) wear the M1938 service uniform with breeches and trousers respectively. The first lieutenant (right), who seems to display two non-regulation rank stars beside the crowned cockade on his forage cap, wears a rumpled working uniform of enlisted ranks' quality, with a closed collar. (© War Museum, Athens)

A2: *Stratigòs* (General) Alexandros Papagos

General Papagos, Chief of Staff (commander-in-chief) of the Greek Army during the Greek–Italian War, as he would have appeared on a visit to the front. He was a graduate of the Brussels Military Academy and the Ypres Cavalry Application School, and was a veteran of the Balkan Wars. Papagos, the only Greek Army officer ever to hold the rank of field marshal (bestowed on 28 October 1949), is portrayed here in a plain double-breasted overcoat, bearing only his gilt metal shoulder-strap ranking of a crown above crossed batons above a Royal Cypher. Note the large size of the gold-embroidered Royal Crown above the cockade on the front of the cap.

A3: *Generale d'Armata* (General) Ugo Cavallero

General Cavallero, a veteran of the Italo–Turkish War of 1912 and World War I, assumed command of the Italian forces in Albania in January 1941. He is portrayed here in the M33 uniform of a three-star general officer, made of fine pale *cordelino* material with silver buttons. Note the gold star of the House of Savoy on the black velvet collar, piped red; his rank insignia of three white silk stripes above a *greca* band, which appear both above his cuffs and around his peaked cap; and the general officers' gold-on-red stylized eagle badge on both the cap front and the stiff silver-braid shoulder boards piped in red. His breeches bear double black stripes flanking a silver stripe.

B: HELLENIC LAND ARMY (*STRATOS XIRÀS*)

B1: *Hoplìtis* (Private), 51st Infantry Regiment, I Division; Epirus front, November 1940

The reservists of Col Davakis's 51st Inf Regt, mobilized only at the end of August (and in the case of III/51, only on 15 October), greatly distinguished themselves during the first days of the war when some 2,000 Greeks scrambled to defend a 23-mile frontage against the 'Julia' Alpine Div's thrusts towards the Metsovon Pass. This figure depicts a typical infantry rifleman in campaign kit, but note that instead of the standard Italian-pattern steel helmet he has an old M1915 Adrian, painted khaki-green and lacking any frontal badge. The modified M1908 brownish-khaki uniform has M1915 tabs in Infantry red on the stand-and-fall collar, and here – unusually – these are complete with the regulation regimental number in white metal. His boots, belt, Y-straps and three pairs of cartridge pouches (one pair at centre rear) are in natural brown leather. The Steyr M1903 bayonet for his Mannlicher–Schoenauer M1903/14 rifle is frogged at his right hip; we can also make out a cloth-covered 1-litre canteen and a canvas haversack slung behind his hips.

B2: *Evzon* (Private), 3/40 Evzones Regiment; Mali i Xhorët, December 1940

This tough rifleman of the mountain light infantry wears the distinctive Evzone uniform as he would have appeared around the time of the Greek Army's push towards Himarë. The field dress consisted of a low cap resembling the French Zouave *chechia,* with a stamped metal crowned cockade and a long black tassel *(farion);* a frock-type tunic (*doulama)* without external pockets; gartered woollen stockings; and mountaineers' hobnailed shoes *(tsarouhia),* which are shown complete with traditional decorative pompons (these, like the cap tassel, were usually removed before going into action). He is armed with an 8mm French Lebel M1886/93 rifle and its cruciform needle bayonet. His personal equipment is conventional Greek issue.

Two Greek Army officers in the snowbound mountains of Albania, wearing a mixture of uniform and extra civilian clothing as protection against the cold. Greek and Italian troops alike suffered severe hardships and privations in the rugged and virtually roadless frontier mountains during winter 1940-41, and hunger was common. (© War Museum, Athens)

B3: *Dekanèas* (Corporal), IV Infantry Brigade; Mount Morava, November 1940

This infantry corporal's status as a regular rather than a conscript is revealed by his yellow chevrons on Infantry red backing. He wears a sleeveless snow-camouflage overall *(fakir)* over his greatcoat and service uniform, as he would have appeared during the Morava–Ivan battle. These rudimentary garments were practical and efficient, and did not significantly constrain the wearer's movements. The M1938 helmet is distinguishable in photos from the Italian M33/34 on which it was based by its lack of ventilation holes at sides and rear; Greek soldiers often wore it over the forage cap. The corporal is armed with a five-shot 8mm French Berthier M1907/16 rifle, several thousand of which were still in use by the Greek Army at the time of the conflict.

C: HELLENIC LAND ARMY

C1: *Hoplìtis* (Private), 9th Infantry Regiment; Albania, December 1940

This infantryman is depicted writing home on the day he was decorated with the Bravery Medal in Silver, its blue and white ribbon bearing a bronze '1940' clasp. The figure shows to good effect a clean example of the undress service uniform: the M1917 field service forage cap, complete with a white metal and blue paint national cockade surmounted by the Royal Crown; the M1938 khaki enlisted ranks' tunic, with Infantry collar tabs; matching 'pantaloons' or semi-breeches, and puttees over laced brown leather ankle boots with a matt 'flesh out' finish. He has laid aside his six-pouch belt equipment and haversack.

C2: *Chionodròmos* (skier), 1st Company, 1st Ski Battalion; Mount Kamia, January 1941

This special uniform was worn between December 1940 and early April 1941 (when the unit was disbanded). It consisted of a khaki-green tunic, and matching straight-leg trousers, gathered at the ankle by thick woollen socks. Skiers typically wore civilian roll-neck sweaters underneath their uniform. Note the lightweight, hooded anorak of white cotton, and the whitened leather belt kit. The skiers were nearly all volunteer sportsmen who contributed their own privately-acquired equipment, wearing various types of mountaineering boots of French, German and Italian manufacture. Here, sun goggles obscure the national cockade on the *képi*-like khaki mountain cap; steel helmets were also worn in combat. He carries privately-purchased wooden skis and bamboo ski poles (the latter secured to the shoulder straps of a Bergen-type canvas rucksack when on the march). The skier is armed with a Steyr-Solothurn S1-100 sub-machine gun slung around his neck. The battalion's commanding officer, Maj Ioannis Paparrodou, was an accomplished athlete and skier; he was killed in action on 15 April 1941 during intense fighting against elements of the 'Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler' motorized brigade.

(During the war Italy also fielded a small ski battalion, the Battaglione Sciatori Monte Cervino, hastily raised from personnel of the Mountain Training School at Aosta and from the 4th Alpine Regiment. Deployed on 13 January 1941, by 26 February its 320 all ranks had been reduced to three officers and 46 enlisted men; this platoon fought on Mt Shëndelli between 5 March and 10 April. See Elite 99, *Italian Army Elite Units & Special Forces 1940–43*.)

C3: *Adelfì Nosokòma* (Nurse), *Ellinikos Erythros Stavros* (Hellenic Red Cross); Himarë, Albania, January 1941

The Hellenic Red Cross's contribution to the war effort was significant; several nurses were decorated in recognition of their services in the field, and some became casualties of Italian air raids. Apart from staffing hospitals to treat war casualties they also distributed food and provided a range of other public care services throughout the war zone. This nurse wears the ΕΕΣ's dark purple service uniform with separate white collar and cuffs, and a navy blue-over-white veil, as she would have appeared when stationed at a field hospital. She displays a red Greek cross on her veil and on a white square patch on her left breast pocket. Barely visible between this and the medal ribbons above it are two red stripes identifying her grade, and between the cross and the button are the red capitals 'ΕΕΣ' for Hellenic Red Cross.

D: HELLENIC LAND FORCES

D1: *Anthypolohagòs* (Second Lieutenant), Infantry, ceremonial uniform; Athens, October 1940

This junior officer wears the very dark Blue No. 1 dress with scarlet facings and piping and gold distinctions, as he would have appeared shortly before the outbreak of the war; its use was then suspended during World War II, but resumed thereafter. His rank is indicated by the single braid around his *képi*, and the single raised boss on the complex shoulder cords ending in interwoven knots. The red standing collar is edged top and front with wide inset gold braid, and bears the grenade badge common to officers of all combat branches. The tunic is piped red down the front, and on the rear down a central vent between two piped, scalloped, three-button false pocket flaps; double piping edges the cuff tops and cuff flaps, gold within red. The sword suspender passes underneath the tunic skirt, not up to the gold-and-silver brocade belt. The closely tailored trousers have a broad red seam-stripe.

D2: *Ypolohagòs* (Lieutenant), 1st Cavalry Regiment, Cavalry Division; Konitsa, February 1941
This officer's No. 4 service dress uniform, complete with a British-style cap, is indistinguishable from that of other arms-of-service except for the colour of the collar tabs bearing gilt metal grenade badges – dark green for Cavalry. Officers' privately purchased uniforms might differ in details, such as the exact shades of shirts and neckties. Together with XIII Inf Div, elements of the Cav Div would finally be overwhelmed by the 'Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler' motorized brigade on 14 April 1941 while attempting to bar the way to the Metsovon Pass.

D3: *Ypenomotàrchis* (Gendarmerie Sergeant), Royal Gendarmerie; Korçë, December 1940
This Gendarmerie NCO is illustrated as he might have appeared after the fall of Korçë to elements of 53rd Bn, 1st Regt, IX Infantry Division. His service is readily distinguishable by his greenish-grey *képi* and M1919 tunic with six white-metal buttons, blue-black tabs on the standing collar, matching detachable shoulder straps, white-on-black diagonal rank stripes on the forearms, and white aiguillettes around his left shoulder. He wears cavalry-style breeches with leather gaiters, and carries a holstered revolver on a black 'Sam Browne' belt. A whistle in his left breast pocket is secured to his second buttonhole with a chain.

Two officers of Italian Alpine troops photographed at Ochrid Lake (Pogradec) in spring 1941, wearing shirtsleeve order. Both have striped service-dress breeches and 'Sam Browne' belts identifying their officer status; one wears kneeboots, the other puttees and ankle boots. (Private collection)

E: ITALIAN ROYAL ARMY (*REGIO ESERCITO*)

E1: *Soldato* (Private), I Battalion, 1st Regiment, 3rd Alpine Division 'Julia'; Samarina, October 1940
This figure depicts a typical *Alpino*, during the unsuccessful push by the 'Julia' Division towards Metsovon east of Ioannina. His distinctive Tyrolean felt hat *(beretto all'alpina)* bears the usual *fregio* badge of the arm of service, and a black crow's feather rising from a tuft; the colour of the tuft identified the regiment, in the sequence white, red, green or blue. Alpine troops displayed a green double-flame *mostrine* on the collar; they were also distinguishable by cleated mountaineering boots with toecaps. He is armed with the 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano M1891 bolt-action rifle; over his belt equipment, with two frontal cartridge pouches and his frogged bayonet, he carries a cloth-covered water canteen slung behind his left hip and a gas mask bag on his right.

E2: *Carrista* (tank crewman), 131st Armoured Division 'Centauro'; January 1941
The vehicle uniform of this M13/40 tank crewman features an M33 padded crash helmet and a three-quarter-length double-breasted coat both in black leather, over M41 medium blue overalls *(combinazione da carro);* these are gathered by elastics over his laced ankle boots. NCOs' rank chevrons were sometimes added to the coat, either in brass pin-back format on the upper sleeves or in standard woven form attached to the left breast. The original photograph shows no *mostrine* displayed on the coat collar, although these were regulation in 1940. In a coat pocket he probably carries his grey-green *bustina* forage cap. His dark brown leather equipment is the standard-issue three-pouch bandolier of the mounted branches, supporting a holstered 9mm Beretta M34 automatic pistol on his right hip.

E3: *Caporale* (Corporal), II Battalion, 47th Infantry Regiment, 23rd Infantry Division 'Ferrara'; Vigla Hill, Epirus, November 1940
This corporal represents the Italian infantryman in standard uniform and equipment, as he would have appeared at the start of the Greek Army's counteroffensive. The M33/34 steel helmet bears the black-stencilled Infantry *fregio.* The M40 version of the four-pocket *giubba* and the *pantaloni* are in typical *grigioverde* colour, worn with puttees over M1912 boots. For the Infantry branch the collar *mostrine* are of divisional pattern, here the 'Ferrara's' royal blue with two red stripes, plus the universal silver Savoy star. His rank is indicated by the deep-over-shallow red chevrons on both upper sleeves. His weapon and equipment are standard issue, as in E1.

F: OFFICERS, ITALIAN *REGIO ESERCITO*

F1: *Maggiore* (Major), I Battalion, 2nd Alpine Artillery Regiment, 2nd Alpine Division 'Tridentina'; January 1941
This field officer of Mountain Artillery, relaxed in everyday M33 service dress, has a superior quality *beretto all'alpina.* This displays a gold-embroidered Mountain Artillery *fregio* on the front, overlaying the contrasting-coloured band, and on the left side rank insignia in the form of deep-over-shallow reversed chevrons of gold braid divided by a silver line. As a field-grade officer he has a white hat feather, mounted in an oval metal boss decorated with the Savoy cross. His tunic is of fine *cordellino* cloth in greenish *grigioverde* with plain shoulder straps and gilt buttons, and yellow-braid rank insignia above the plain turn-back cuffs – one shallow stripe

Two of these Italian officers of divisional artillery wear light khaki tropical tunics of *'sahariana'* cut, with shirt-type collars, buttoned cuff-bands, and the upper pocket flaps integral to the chest panels; they seem to display no insignia. (Private collection)

with an oval 'curl' above one deeper stripe. The Mountain Artillery branch is indicated by the orange-yellow line along the base of his green double collar 'flames' set on black collar facing, and the orange-yellow piping between the two black stripes on his breeches. He wears a holstered Beretta M34 on his 'Sam Browne'-style belt. His medal ribbons are for long service, World War I service, and a 1922 commemoration of national unification.

F2: *Capitano* (Captain) of Infantry, parade uniform; Albania, October 1940

The peaked service cap has a black patent-leather chinstrap and peak, and around the band the three equal gold stripes of this rank are separated by two silver stripes; the whole front depth is occupied by a large crowned arm-of-service badge embroidered in gold and silver wire. This M34 *uniforme di marcia* – worn with white gloves, a white shirt and black tie – is tailored in superior cloth of a noticeably grey shade, with gilt buttons. It has pre-war black velvet collar facing with scarlet edge-piping (barely visible here), bearing rectangular scarlet patches with a central line of gold piping and a gilt Savoy star. (The 29th Inf Div 'Piemonte' had plain red patches.) Rigid gold-braid shoulder boards *(controspaline)* are piped scarlet and bear a large central gilt-metal Infantry badge. Note also scarlet piping at the top of the cuffs below the sleeve ranking, and between the two black sidestripes of the breeches. Over the ceremonial sash of azure-blue silk common to all Italian officers he has a pouch belt in gold braid on black leather, with lavish silver furniture. Dark brown suspenders for the steel-furnished M1888 sword pass under the tunic to an interior belt.

F3: *Capitano*, II Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 5th Alpine Division 'Pusteria'; Selska, Albania, November 1940

This officer is reconstructed as he might have appeared in late November, before the Greek Army's capture of Gijrokastër. His Tyrolean hat has a cord, three shallow gold rank chevrons on the left side, and from the metal boss a black feather rising from the green tuft identifying the division's third regiment. He too has a pre-war service tunic, with the green double flames of the Alpini set on green-piped black collar facing; green cuff-piping; and grey service shoulder boards piped in green, bearing a gold-embroidered arm-of-service badge. Note, just visible on his upper left sleeve, the green and gold metal divisional shield of the 'Pusteria'; this bore gold oak leaves at the top, a centred upright *gladius* sword, '5' below its hilt, and the designation and name in arcs on each side. His breeches have the green seam-piping of the Alpini between the black stripes.

G: NAVAL FORCES

G1: Petty Officer 1st Class, *Vassiliko Polemiko Naftiko* (HRN), December 1940

The Blue No. 1 service dress of HRN petty/warrant officers was similar to that of commissioned officers, and both closely resembled those of the British Royal Navy. The petty officer's peaked (visored) cap had a slightly smaller crown than the officers', and the large cap badge was somewhat simplified. On the sleeve of his reefer jacket the star beneath the two gold chevrons of his rank identifies him as a coxswain.

G2: *Diopos* (Leading Seaman), HRN; HHMS *Georghios* Averoff, October 1940

The figure depicts an HRN rating in basic 'square rig', sporting the red double chevrons of a leading seaman and the propellor badge identifying him as a machinist. Again, other than the *'Averoff'* cap tally of the Greek flagship his uniform is practically indistinguishable from that of the RN. In addition to the 'blues' shown here, there were white summer and light khaki fatigue uniforms. (Here the white summer cap cover is anachronistic for the season.)

G3*:Tenente di Vascello* (First Lieutenant), *Regia Marina;* gala uniform, October 1940

This junior officer of the Italian Royal Navy is illustrated in gala uniform *(divisa di gala)* and accoutrements. This consists of a bicorne *(feluca),* and a double-breasted, tailed frock coat worn with ornate gilt metallic and fringed epaulettes. Note that the upper stripe of the cuff rank insignia did not have a 'curl' on this uniform. He wears matching trousers with a gold seam-stripe, and white gloves. A gilt-furnished black leather belt supports the naval officer's sword, and is worn over the traditional bright blue ceremonial sash sported by all Italian officers since the unification of the kingdom under the House of Savoy. His decorations are the Gold Medal for Military Valor, the War Cross, and the 1915-18 War Medal[5].

H: AIR FORCES

H1: *Yposminagòs* (Flight Lieutenant) Marinos Mitralexis, *Ellinikì Vassilikì Aeroporìa* (HRAF), 22nd *Mira Dìoxis* (Fighter Squadron); Thessaloniki/Sedes, November 1940

Flight Lieutenant Mitralexis wears the HRAF's winter blue-grey

5 For fuller details of *Regia Marina* and *Regia Aeronautica* uniforms, see Osprey Elite 191, *Italian Navy & Air Force Elite Units & Special Forces 1940–45.*

service dress closely resembling that of the RAF, but with a diamond-shaped 'curl' in the light-blue-on-black cuff ranking. There was also a light khaki summer uniform of the same cut. Pilots wore white-embroidered 'wings' on their left breast. On 2 November 1940, while holding the rank of pilot officer, Mitralexis famously scored Greece's first aerial victories in his PZL.24 (Δ 120) when he shot down one Italian bomber, and then brought down a second by ramming its tail with the propeller of his PZL. The medal ribbon he displays is that of the Bravery Award in Gold awarded for this action (two white and three bright blue vertical stripes).

H2: *Anthyposminagòs* (Pilot Officer), HRAF, 32nd *Mira Vomvardismou* (Bomber Squadron); Trikkala, December 1940

This Greek Blenheim pilot, sharing an airfield with Gladiators of No.80 Sqn RAF, wears a winter flying suit, as he would have appeared before a bombing sortie over Albania; his sheepskin flying helmet is stuffed into his leg pocket. The large gold-embroidered HRAF badge on his blue-grey forage cap is the only detail identifying him as an officer (the cap badge worn by other ranks was stamped in white metal).

H3: *Tenente pilota* (Lieutenant pilot), *Regia Aeronautica*; Brindisi, November 1940

This blue-grey service dress was worn by Italian Royal Air Force officers from 1923, with gold distinctions; here the white shirt and black tie indicate a formal order of dress. Like the HRAF (and indeed, the RAF) tunic, it has an integral uniform-cloth belt. The crowned cap badge shows a wreathed eagle, and the tunic displays the star of the Royal House of Savoy in gilt metal on the lapels. His qualification as a pilot is shown by the gilt metal crowned eagle on the left breast, above his medal ribbons. His rank is displayed both above the cuffs, in similar form to the Army's commissioned rank insignia but with a diamond-shaped 'curl' in the top stripe, and by the two equal-width braid rings around the band of the peaked cap. The transverse gold-embroidered boxes on the shoulders, which replaced conventional shoulder straps in the early 1930s, have a single border and a sceptre symbol, identifying a junior officer and the flying branch respectively.

In combat, Italian aircrew wore one of two types of one – or two – piece flying clothing: a greyish canvas lined winter version with a fur collar, or a lighter summer version in white linen. Alternatively they might wear khaki shorts in the hottest months.

Standing by an Avro 621 Tutor before the war, Sqn Ldr Ioannis Kellass would go on to command the HRAF's 21st Fighter Sqn during the conflict, flying PZL P.24s and later Gloster Gladiators. Under the parachute harness and over his flying overalls he wears a thick civilian woollen sweater. The 'E.' before the number (here, '50') on the fuselage identified HRAF trainers. (© War Museum, Athens)

INDEX

Figures in **bold** refer to illustrations.

Abyssinia 3, 22, 37
Albania 3, **4**, 5, 6, **7**, 8, **9**, 14, **21**, 22, **C27**, **33**, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, **42**, 43, **44**, 46, 47
Allied Forces **34**, 39
Alpini, the **7**, **8**, 20, 33, 34, 46
ammunition 5, 11, 18, 19, 34, 35
annexation **4**, 7, 41
artillery 10, **11**, 12, **13**, 14, **16**, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, **F30**, 33, 41, 45, **46**
Asia Minor 10, 43
Athens 5, 6, **D28**, 36, 37, **39**, 44
Austria **13**, 18, 20
auxiliaries 5, 39
Axis Forces 3, 40

Badoglio, Marshal 5, 8, 41
Balkan Wars, the 10, 12, 15, 18, 40, 43
Bersaglieri **4**, 22, 24, 33
breeches **7**, 15, **16**, 17, 18, **24**, 33, **43**, 44, **45**, 46
Brindisi **4**, 6, **H32**, 37, 47
Britain 3, 4, 12, 37, **38**, 39, 42
British Army 16, 41
Bulgaria 3, 6, 9, 12, 18, 40

cadet officers (*Dókimoi Éfedroi Axiomatikoí*) 15, **17**
Cavallero, General Ugo 5, **A25**, 43
cockades **15**, 16, **43**, 44
company officers (*ufficiali inferiori*) 17, 23
conscription 14, 22
conscripts **3**, 14, 17, 22, 23, 34, 42, 44
Crete 6, 39, **40**

Davakis, Colonel 5, 14, 43

Egypt 6, 38, 41
engineers 17, **24**, 33
Epirus 5, 6, **9**, 14, 22, **B26**, **E29**, 43, 45
equipment 6, **8**, 10, **11**, **12**, **13**, 18, **19**, 20, **34**, 43, 44, 45
Europe 3, 14, 20, 42

field officers (*ufficiali superiori*) 17, 23, **24**, **37**, 45
forage caps **9**, **10**, 15, 16, **17**, **22**, 43, 44, 45, 47
France 3, **4**, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19, 33, 35, 36, 37, **42**, 43, 44
  Zouaves 16, **33**, 43

gas masks 19, 35, 45
general officers (*ufficiali generali*) 16, 17, 23, 34, 43
Germany 3, 6, **9**, 11, **12**, 18, 19, 36, 38, 39, 40, 44
Greece **3**, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 22, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 47
  Greek Army (*Ellinikòs Stratòs*) 3, 5, 6, 8, **9**, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, **19**, 20, 21, 22, 34, 40, 41, **42**, **43**, **44**, 45, 46
Greek–Italian War 3, 4, 9, **11**, 13, **15**, 20, 22, 33, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43

haversacks 19, 43, 44
Hellenic Land Army (*Stratos Xiràs*) **9**, 14, **15**, **B26**, **C27**, 43, 44
Hellenic Red Cross (*Ellinikos Erythros Stavros*) **C27**, 44
Hellenic Royal Air Force (HRAF) (*Ellinikì Vassilikì Aeroporìa*) **4**, 5, 6, **H32**, 35, **36**, 37, 46, **47**
Hellenic Royal Navy (HRN) 4, 5, 6, 37, **38**, 46
helmets **4**, 11, **18**, 35, **36**
  Adrian **12**, 19, 35; flying helmet **36**, 47; Mk I 'Brodie' 19; M33/34 **18**, 19, 35, 44, 45; M1938 18, 19, 44; steel 34, 43, 44, 45
HHMS *Georghios Averoff* **G31**, 38, 46
Hitler, Adolf 4, 6, 44, 45

infantrymen 17, 18, **22**, 44, 45
insignia 15, 17, 23, 33, 34, **38**, 41, **46**
  rank 17, 18, **24**, 33, 34, 43, 45, 46, 47
Italy 3, **4**, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, **34**, **35**, 37, 39, 41, 42, 44
Italian Army 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 20, 22, **24**, **34**, 41, 42; Italian Royal Army (Regio Esercito) 3, 8, 9, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 40, 41, 45

Kleissoura Pass 5, 6, **8**
Konitsa 5, **D28**, 45

Liberals, the 10, 15

machine guns 10, 12, 13, 14, 19, 21, 33, 34, **35**
Mali i Xhorët **B26**, 43
manoeuvres 9, 14, 16
Mediterranean: Eastern 4; Fleet 6, 38, 39
Metaxas, Ioannis 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 40, 42
Metaxas Line the 6, 12
Metsovon Pass, the **5**, 6, 43, 45
military units: army corps 10, 12, 14, 20; Hellenic Land Army: 'A' Army Corps 14; 'B' Army Corps 14; 'C' Army Corps 14; 'D' Army Corps 14; 'E' Epsilon Army Corps 14; Italian Army: Northern (XXVI) Army Corps 22; Southern (XXV) 'Ciamuria' Army Corps 22; battalions 12, 13, 14, 20, 21, 22, 33, 34, 40, 41, 44; divisions **5**, 6, 8, 10, 12, **13**, 14, 20, 21, **22**, **B26**, **35**, **40**, 41, 42, 43, 45, **46**; cavalry 12, 13, 22, **D28**, 45; infantry **5**, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 21, 22, **E29**, 41, 43, 45, 46; regiments 11, 12, **13**, 14, 16, 20, 21, 22, 34, 36, 43, 44, 45, 46; artillery **13**, 14, 21, 22, 45; infantry 11, 12, 13, 20, 21, 43, 44, 45; Hellenic Land Army (Stratos Xiràs): 3/40 Evzones **B26**, 43; 9th Infantry Regiment **C27**, 44; 1st Company, 1st Ski Battalion **C27**, 44; 1st Cavalry Regiment, Cavalry Division **D28**, 45; Italian Royal Army (Regio Esercito): 1st Regiment, 3rd Alpine Division 'Julia' 4, 5, 21, 22, E29, 43, 45; 131st Armoured Division 'Centauro' **D28**, 45; 47th Infantry Regiment, 23rd Infantry Division 'Ferrara' 22, **E29**, 45; 2nd Alpine Artillery Regiment, 2nd Alpine Division 'Tridentina' 21, **F30**, 45; 3rd Regiment, 5th Alpine Division 'Pusteria' 21, **F30**, 46; Mitralexis, *Yposminagòs* (Flight Lieutenant) Marinos **H32**, 46, 47; air forces: 22nd Mira Dìoxis (Fighter Squadron) **H32**, 36, 46; 32nd Mira Vomvardismou (Bomber Squadron) 5, **H32**, 37, 47

mobilization 11, 12, 20
mortars 10, 11, 12, 13, **19**, 20, 21, 34
mountain guns 11, 12, **13**
Mussolini, Benito 4, 6, 8, 9, 20, 23, 34, 41

non-commissioned officers (NCOs) (*Ypaxiomatikoi*) **11**, **16**, **17**, **18**, **23**, **33**, **39**, **45**
North Africa **39**, **40**

Ochrid Lake (Pogradec) 5, **45**

Papagos, General Alexandros 6, 11, 15, **A25**, 43
Pindus 5, 14, **15**, 22, 42, 43
Piraeus 6, **39**, 40
pistols/revolvers 18, 19, 34, 45
Prespa Lakes 5, 14
Primavera offensive 6, 41
propaganda 9, **40**

rations 12, 35
reconnaissance **4**, 12, 13, 14, 17, 21, 22, 36
Regia Aeronautica 6, **37**, 42, 46, 47
Regia Marina **38**, 39, 46
reparations **13**, 20
rifles 12, 13, 18, 19, **23**, **34**, 43, 44, 45
Royal Air Force (RAF) 5, 6, 36, 37, **39**, 47
Royal Crown, the 16, 17, 18, 19, 43, 44
Royal Gendarmerie, the (*Vassiliki Chorofylaki*) 16, **18**, **D28**, 45
Royal House of Savoy 33, 43, 46, 47
  Savoy stars **7**, 33, **37**, **38**, 45, 46
Royal Navy (RN), the 6, 39, 46
Royalists, the 10, 15, 42

Sedes (Thessaloniki) **H32**, **36**, 46
senior privates (*Ypodekaneis*) **10**, 17
shoulder straps (*epomìdes*) **15**, 16, **17**, **18**, 24, 33, 43, 44, 45, 47
Spain 3, 22, 37
sub-machine guns 12, 13, 18, 34, 44
supplies **9**, 11

telecommunications **11**, 12
training 10, 14, **19**, **20**, 22, 23, 44

uniforms **4**, **7**, 11, **15**, 16, **17**, **18**, **20**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **F30**, **G31**, 33, **34**, 35, 37, 39, **40**, **42**, **43**, **44**, 45, 46, 47; M33 **20**, **22**, **23**, **24**, **34**, 43, 45; service **15**, 24, **43**, 44

Venizelos, Eleftherios 15, 35
Vrahnos, Major-General Vassileios 5, **A25**, 43

World War I 15, 18, 20, 24, 33, 35, **42**, 43, 46
World War II 3, 22, 23, 39, 42, 44

Yugoslavia 3, 6, 22, 36

Osprey Publishing
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
PO Box 883, Oxford, OX1 9PL, UK
Or:
c/o Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.
1385 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018, USA
E-mail: info@ospreypublishing.com

www.ospreypublishing.com

OSPREY is a trademark of Osprey Publishing Ltd, a division of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
First published in Great Britain in 2017

© 2017 Osprey Publishing Ltd
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any form without prior written permission, except in the case of brief quotation embodied in critical articles or reviews. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978 1 47281 917 8
ePub: 978 1 47281 919 2
ePDF: 978 1 47281 918 5
XML: 978 1 47282 710 4

Editor: Martin Windrow
Index by Mark Swift
Typeset in Helvetica Neue and ITC New Baskerville
Page layouts by PDQ Digital Media Solutions, Bungay, UK

Osprey Publishing supports the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Between 2014 and 2018 our donations are being spent on their Centenary Woods Project in the UK.

Title page photograph: A group of Greek Army officers pose before a humorously altered Italian Fascist slogan painted on a wall somewhere in Albania. *'DUCE A NOI'* in Italian means 'Our Leader is With Us', while *'DUCE A NOITE'* in Greek translates roughly as 'Mussolini, you fool!' (© War Museum, Athens)

Dedication

This book is gratefully dedicated to my Mother, Krystallia, and to the memory of the fallen of the Greek–Italian War, in the hope that their sacrifice will not be forgotten, and that this will have been the last armed conflict between their two nations.

Author's note

Place names: Towns and locations within present-day Albania are referred to in this text by their Albanian, as well as by their corresponding Greek and Italian names, where applicable. Towns and locations in present-day Greece appear in the text under their Greek and, where applicable, Italian names.
Transliteration: In the absence of commonly accepted transliteration rules for the rendition of Greek characters into Latin script, the approach adopted for this text is the form best corresponding to the phonetics of the relevant Greek characters and diphthongs.

Acknowledgements

For their invaluable contributions and support in the preparation of this book, the author is grateful to Messrs Dimitris Kachrilas and Evangellos Ananiades Bassias, to Ms Dimitra Karli of the Photographic Archives of the Athens War Museum, as well as to Ms Zanet Battinou and Ms Anastasia Loudarou of the Jewish Museum of Greece.

Artist's Note

Readers may care to note that the original paintings from which the colour plates in this book were prepared are available for private sale. All reproduction copyright whatsoever is retained by the Publishers. All enquiries should be addressed to:

Peter Dennis, Fieldhead, The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire NG18 2AT, UK

The Publishers regret that they can enter into no correspondence upon this matter.

Abbreviations used in this text:

AA	anti-aircraft
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in World War I – in World War II, popular term for any troops from those countries.
AT	anti-tank
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
Co	Company
CO	Commanding officer
Div	Division
HRAF	Hellenic Royal Air Force
HRN	Hellenic Royal Navy
LMG	light machine gun
MG	machine gun
MVSN	*Milizia Volontare per la Sicurezza Nationale* (Italian Fascist 'Black Shirt' militia)
NCO	non-commissioned officer
PO	pilot officer (Air Force rank)
RAF	Royal Air Force (British)
Regt	Regiment
RN	Royal Navy (British)
Sgt	Sergeant
Sqn	Squadron